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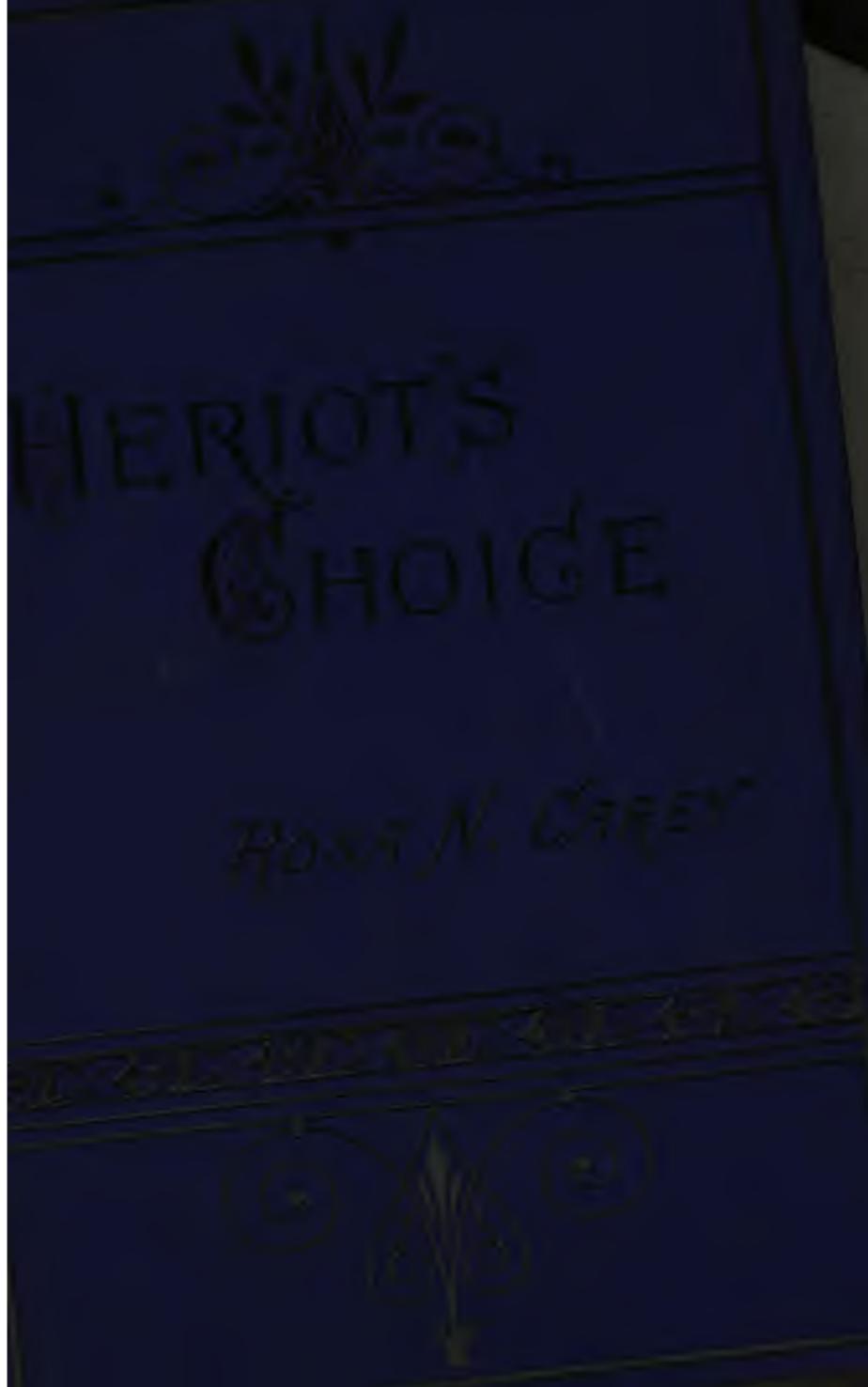
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HERIOT'S CHOICE

HERIOT'S CHOICE

By Tale

BY
ROSA NOUCHETTE CAREY

AUTHOR OF
"NELLIE'S MEMORIES," "WOOED AND MARRIED," ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES.—VOL. I

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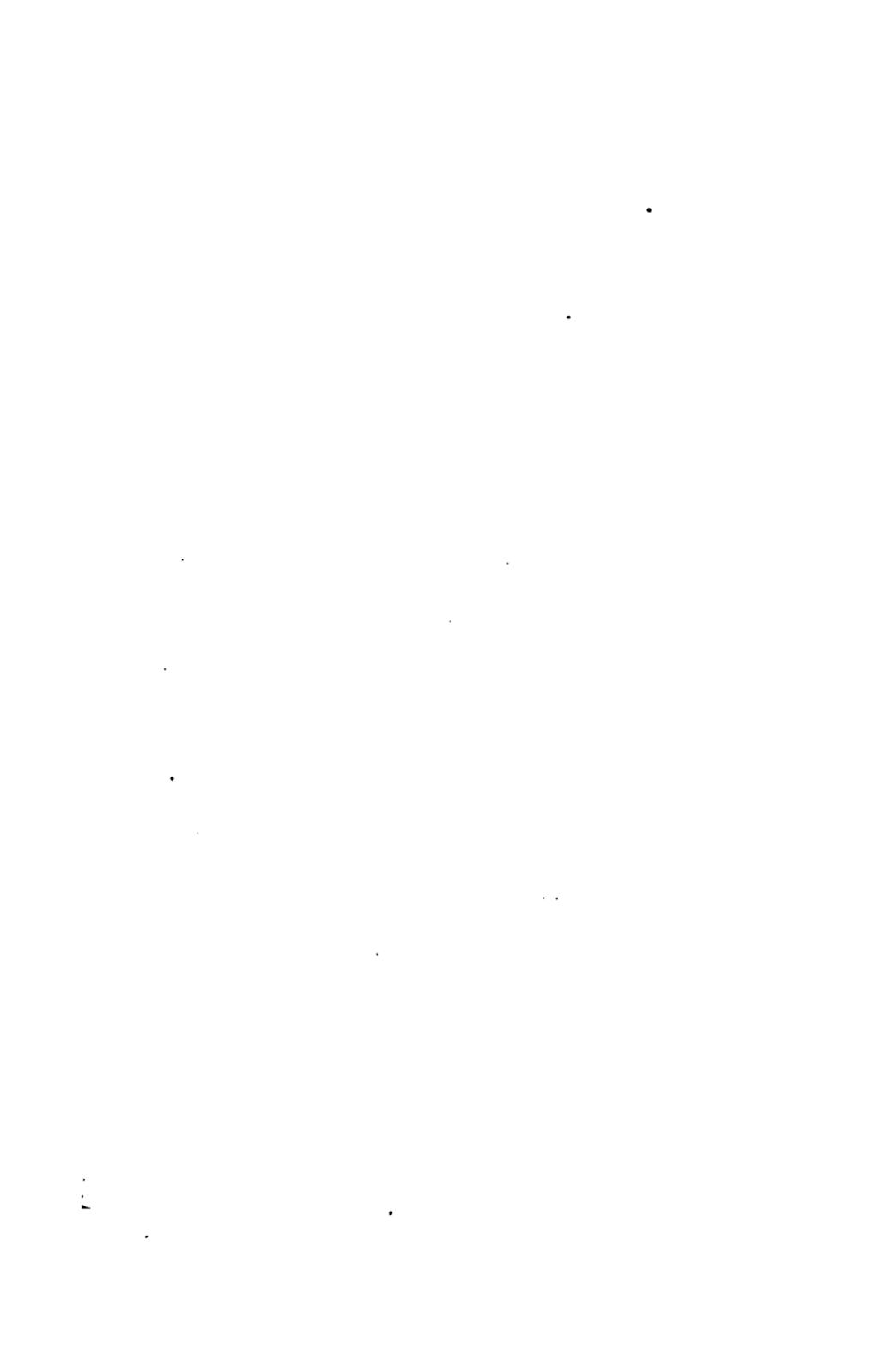
TO

The Rev. Canon Simpson, LL.D.

THIS STORY

IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED BY

THE AUTHOR



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HERIOT'S CHOICE.

CHAPTER I.

“SAY YES, MILLY.”

“Man’s importunity is God’s opportunity.”

“O fair, O fine, O lot to be desired !
Early and late my heart appeals to me,
And says, ‘O work, O will—Thou man, be fired,
To earn this lot—’ she says—‘I would not be
A worker for mine own bread, or one hired
For mine own profit. O, I would be free
To work for others ; love so earned of them
Should be my wages and my diadem.”—*Jean Ingelow.*

“SAY yes, Milly.”

Three short words, and yet they went straight to Milly’s heart. It was only the postscript of a long, sorrowful letter—the finale brief but eloquent—of a quiet, dispassionate appeal ; but it sounded to Mildred Lambert much as the Macedonian cry must have sounded of old : “Come over and help us.”

Mildred's soft, womanly nature was capable of only one response to such a demand. Assent was more than probable, and bordered on certainty, even before the letter was laid aside, and while her cheek was yet paling at the thought of new responsibilities and the vast unknown, wherein duty must tread on the heel of inclination, and life must press out thought and the worn-out furrows of intro- and retro-spection.

And so it was that the page of a negative existence was turned ; and Mildred agreed to become the inmate of her brother's home.

“Aunt Milly !” How pleasant it would be to hear that again, and to be in the centre of warm young life and breathless activity, after the torpor of long waiting and watching, and the hush and the blank and the drawn-out pain, intense yet scarcely felt, of the last seven years.

To begin life in its fulness at eight-and twenty ; to taste of its real sweets and bitters, after it had offered to her nothing but the pale brackish flavour of regret for a passing youth and wasted powers, responsive rather than suggestive (if there be such monstrous anomaly on the whole face of God's creation), nothing being wasted, and all pronounced good, that comes direct from the Divine

Hand. To follow fresh tracks when the record of the years had left nothing but the traces of the chariot-wheels of daily monotonous duties that dragged heavily, when summer and winter and seed-time and harvest found Mildred still through those seven revolving courses of seasons within the walls of that quiet sick room.

It is given to some women to look back on these long level blanks of life; on mysteries of waiting, that intervene between youth and work, when the world's noise comes dimly to them, like the tumult of city's streets through closed shutters; when pain and hardship seem preferable to their death-in-life, and they long to prove the armour that has grown rusted with disuse.

How many a volume could be written, and with profit, on the watchers as well as the workers of life, on the bystanders as well as the sufferers. "Patient hearts their pain to see." Well has this thought been embodied in the words of a nineteenth-century Christian poet; while to many a pallid malcontent, wearied with inaction and panting for strife, might the Divine words still be applied: "Could ye not have watched with Me one hour?"

Mildred Lambert's life for eight-and-twenty
1 *

years might be summed up in a few sentences. A happy youth, scarcely clouded by the remembrance of a dead father and the graves of the sisters that came between her infancy and the maturer age of her only brother ; and then the blurred brightness when Arnold, who had married before he had taken orders, became the hard-working vicar of a remote Westmoreland parish—and he and his wife and children — passed out of Milly's daily life.

Milly was barely nineteen when this happened ; but even then her mother—who had always been ailing—was threatened with a chronic complaint involving no ordinary suffering ; and now began the long seven years' watching which faded Milly's youth and roses together.

Milly had never known how galling had been the strain to the nerves—how intense her own tenacity of will and purpose, till she had folded her mother's pale hands together ; and with a lassitude too great for tears, felt as she crept away that her work was finished none too soon, and that even her firm young strength was deserting her.

Trouble had not come singly to Mildred. News of her sister-in-law's unexpected death had reached her, just before her mother's last brief attack, and

her brother had been too much stunned by his own loss to come to her in her loneliness.

Not that Milly wondered at this. She loved Arnold dearly ; but he was so much older, and they had grown necessarily so apart. He and his wife had been all in all to each other ; and the family in the vicarage had seemed so perfected and completed that the little petted Milly of old days might well plead that she was all but forgotten.

But Betha's death had altered this ; and Arnold's letter, written as good men will write when their heart is well-nigh broken, came to Mildred as she sat alone in her black dress in her desolate home.

New work—unknown work—and that when youth's elasticity seemed gone, and spirits broken or at least dangerously quieted by the morbid atmosphere of sickness and hypochondria. They say the prisoner of twenty years will weep at leaving his cell. The tears that Mildred shed that night were more for the mother she had lost and the old safe life of the past, than pity for the widowed brother and motherless children.

Do we ever outlive our selfishness, I wonder?
Do we ever cease to be fearful for ourselves?

And yet Mildred was weary of solitude. Arnold

was her own, her only brother ; and Aunt Milly—well, perhaps it might be pleasant.

“ Say yes, Milly—for Betha’s sake—for my darling’s sake (she was so fond of you), if not for mine. Think how her children miss her ! Matters are going wrong already. It is not their fault, poor things ; but I am so helpless to decide. I used to leave everything to her, and we are all so utterly lost.

“ I could not have asked you if our mother had lingered ; but your faithful charge, my poor Milly, is over—your martyrdom, as Betha called it. She was so bright, and loved to have things so bright round her, that your imprisonment in the sick-room quite oppressed her. It was ‘ poor Milly,’ ‘ our dear good Milly,’ to the last. I wish her girls were more like her ; but she only laughed at their odd ways, and told me I should live to be proud of them.

“ Olive is as left-handed as ever, and Chrissy little better. Richard is mannish, but impracticable, and a little difficult to understand. We should none of us get on at all but for Roy : he has his mother’s heart-sunshine, and loving smile ; but even Roy has his failures.

“ We want a woman among us, Milly—a woman

with head and hands, and a tolerable stock of patience. Even Heriot is in difficulties, but that will keep till you come—for you will come, will you not, my dear?”

“Come! how could you doubt me, Arnold?” replied Mildred, as she laid down the letter; but “God help me and them” followed close on the sigh.

“After all, it is a clear call to duty,” she soliloquised. “It is not my business to decide on my fitness or unfitness, or to measure myself to my niche. We are not promised strength before the time, and no one can tell before he tries whether he be likely to fail. Richard’s manliness, and Olive’s left-handed ways, and Chrissy’s poorer imitation, shall not daunt me. Arnold wants me. I shall be of use to some one again, and I will go.”

But Mildred, for all her bravery, grew a little pale over her brother’s second letter:—“You must come at once, and not wait to summer and winter it, or, as some of our old women say, ‘to bide the bitterness on’t.’ Shall I send Richard to help you about your house business, and to settle your goods and chattels? Let the old furniture go, Milly; it has stood a fair amount of wear and tear, and you are young yet, my dear. Shall I send Dick? He

was his mother's right hand. The lad's mannish for his nineteen years." Mannish again! This Richard began to be formidable. He was a bright well-looking lad of thirteen when Mildred had seen him last. But she remembered his mother's fond descriptions of Cardie's cleverness and goodness. One sentence had particularly struck her at the time. Betha had been comparing her boys, and dwelling on their good points with a mother's partiality. "As to Roy, he needs no praise of mine; he stands so well in everyone's estimation—and in his own, too—that a little fault-finding would do him good. Cardie is different: his diffidence takes the form of pride; no one understands him but I—not even his father. The one speaks out too much, and the other too little; but one of these days he will find out his son's good heart."

"I wonder if Arnold will recognise me," thought Mildred, sorrowfully, that night, as she sat by her window, looking out on her little strip of garden, shimmering in the moonlight. "I feel so old and changed, and have grown into such quiet ways. Are there some women who are never young, I wonder? Am I one of them? Is it not strange," she continued, musingly, "that such beautiful lives as Betha's are struck so suddenly out of the records

of years, while I am left to take up the incomPLETED work she discharged so lovingly? Dear Betha! what a noble heart it was! Arnold reverenced as much as he loved her. How vain to think of replacing, even in the faintest degree, one of the sweetest women this earth ever saw: sweet, because her whole life was in exact harmony with her surroundings.” And there rose before Mildred’s eyes a faint image that often haunted her—of a face with smiling eyes, and hair just touched with grey—and the small firm hand that, laid on unruly lips, could hush coming wrath, and smooth the angry knitting of baby brows.

It was strange, she thought, that neither Olive nor Chrissy were like their mother. Roy’s fairness and steady blue eyes were her sole reliques—Roy, who was such a pretty little fellow when Mildred had seen him last.

Mildred tried to trace out a puzzled thought in her head before she slept that night. A postscript in Arnold’s letter, vaguely worded, but most decidedly mysterious, gave rise to a host of conjectures.

“I have just found out that Heriot’s business must be settled long before the end of next month —when you come to us. You know him by name and repute, though not personally. I have given

him your address. I think it will be better for you both to talk the matter over, and to give it your full consideration, before you start for the north. Make any arrangements you like about the child. Heriot's a good fellow, and deserves to be helped ; he has been everything to us through our trouble."

What could Arnold mean ? Betha's chatty letters—thoroughly womanly in their gossip—had often spoken of Arnold's friend, Dr. Heriot, and of his kindness to their boys. She had described him as a man of great talents, and an undoubted acquisition to their small society. "Arnold (who was her universal referee) wondered that a man like Dr. Heriot should bury himself in a Westmoreland valley. Some one had told them that he had given up a large West-end practice. There was some mystery about him ; his wife made him miserable. No one knew the rights or the wrongs of it ; but they would rather believe anything than that he was to blame."

And in another letter she wrote : "A pleasant evening has just been sadly interrupted. The Bishop was here and one or two others, Dr. Heriot among them ; but a telegram summoning him to his wife's death-bed had just reached him.

“Arnold, who stood by him, says he turned as pale as death as he read it ; but he only put it into his hand without a word, and left the room. I could not help following him with a word of comfort, remembering how good he was to us when we had nearly lost Chrissy last year ; but he looked at me so strangely that the words died on my lips. ‘When death only relieves us of a burthen, Mrs. Lambert, we touch on a sorrow too great for any ordinary comfort. You are sorry for me, but pray for her.’ And wringing my hand, he turned away. She must have been a bad wife to him. He is a good man ; I am sure of it.”

How strange that Dr. Heriot should be coming to see her, and on private business, too ! It seemed so odd of Arnold to send him ; and yet it was pleasant to feel that she was to be consulted and her opinion respected. “Mildred, who loves to help everybody, must find some way of helping poor Heriot,” had been her brother’s concluding words.

Mildred Lambert’s house was one of those modest suburban residences lying far back on a broad sunny road bordering on Clapham Common ; but on a May afternoon even Laurel Cottage, unpretentious as it was, was not devoid of attractions,

with its trimly cut lawn and clump of sweet-scented lilac and yellow drooping laburnum, stretching out long fingers of gold in the sunshine.

Mildred was sitting alone in her little drawing-room, ostensibly sorting her papers, but in reality falling into an occasional reverie, lulled by the sunshine and the silence, when a brisk footstep on the gravel outside the window made her start. Visitors were rare in her secluded life, and, with the exception of the doctor and the clergyman, and perhaps a sympathising neighbour, few ever invaded the privacy of Laurel Cottage; the light, well-assured footstep sounded strange in Mildred's ears, and she listened with inward¹ perturbation to Susan's brief colloquy with the stranger.

“Yes, her mistress was disengaged; would he send in his name and business, or would he walk in?” And the door was flung open a little testily by Susan, who objected to this innovation on their usual afternoon quiet.

“Forgive me, if I am intruding, Miss Lambert, but your brother told me I might call.”

“Dr. Heriot.”

“Yes; he has kept his promise then, and has written to inform you of my intended visit? We

have heard so much of each other that I am sure we ought to need no special introduction.” But though Dr. Heriot, as he said this, held out his hand with a frank smile, a grave, penetrating look accompanied his words ; he was a man rarely at fault, but for the moment he seemed a little perplexed.

“ Yes, I expected you ; will you sit down ? ” replied Mildred, simply. She was not a demonstrative woman, and of late had grown into quiet ways with strangers. Dr. Heriot’s tone had slightly discomposed her ; instinctively she felt that he failed to recognise in her some given description, and that a brief embarrassment was the result.

Mildred was right. Dr. Heriot was trying to puzzle out some connection between the worn, soft-eyed woman before him, and the fresh girlish face that had so often smiled down on him from the vicarage wall, with shy, demure eyes, and the roses in her belt not brighter than the pure colouring of her bloom. The laughing face had grown sad and quiet—painfully so, Dr. Heriot thought—and faint lines round mouth and brow bore witness to the strain of a wearing anxiety and habitual repression of feeling ; the skin of the forehead was too tightly stretched, and the eyes shone too dimly for health ;

while the thin, colourless cheek, seen in juxtaposition to the black dress, told their own story of youthful vitality sacrificed to the inexorable demand of hypochondria.

But it was a refined, womanly face, and one that could not fail to interest ; a kind patient soul looked through the quiet eyes ; youth and its attractions had faded, but a noble unconsciousness had replaced it ; in talking to her you felt instinctively that the last person of whom Mildred thought was herself. But if Dr. Heriot were disappointed in the estimate he had formed of his friend's sister, Mildred on her side was not the less surprised at his appearance.

She had imagined him a man of imposing aspect — a man of height and inches, with iron-grey hair. The real Dr. Heriot was dark and slight, rather under-sized than otherwise, with a dark moustache, and black, closely-cropped hair, which made him look younger than he really was. It was not a handsome face ; at first sight there was something stern and forbidding about it, but the lines round the mouth relaxed pleasantly when he smiled, and the eyes had a clear, straightforward look ; while about the whole man there was a certain indefinable air of good-breeding, as of one long accustomed to

hold his own amongst men who were socially his superiors.

Mildred had taken her measurement of Dr. Heriot in her own quiet way long before she had exhausted her feminine budget of conversation: the fineness of the weather, the long dusty journey, his need of refreshment, and inquiries after her brother's health and spirits.

“ He is not a man to be embarrassed, but his business baffles him,” she thought to herself; “ he is ill at ease, and unhappy. I must try and meet him half-way.” And accordingly Mildred began in her straightforward manner.

“ It is a long way to come up on business, Dr. Heriot. Arnold told me you had difficulties, though he did not explain their nature. Strange to say, he spoke as though I could be of some assistance to you ! ”

“ I have no right to burthen you,” he returned, somewhat incoherently; “ you look little fit now to cope with such responsibilities as must fall to your share. Would not rest and change be beneficial before entering on new work ? ”

“ I am not talking of myself,” returned Mildred, with a faint smile, though her colour rose at the unmistakable tone of sympathy in Dr. Heriot's

voice. "My time for rest will come presently. Is it true, Dr. Heriot, that I can be of any service to you?"

"You shall judge," was the answer. "I will meet your kindness with perfect frankness. My business in London at the present moment concerns a little girl—a distant relative of my poor wife's—who has lost her only remaining parent. Her father and I were friends in our student days; and in a weak moment I accepted a presumptive guardianship over the child. I thought Philip Ellison was as likely as not to outlive me, and as he had some money left him there seemed very little risk about the whole business."

Mildred gave him a glance full of intelligence. It was clear to her now wherein Dr. Heriot's difficulty lay. He was still too young a man to have the sole guardianship of a motherless orphan.

"Philip was but a few years older than myself, and, as he explained to me, it was only a purely business arrangement, and that in case of his death he wished to have a disinterested person to look after his daughter's interest. Things were different with me then, and I had no scruples in acceding to his wish. But Philip Ellison was a bad manager, and on an evil day was persuaded to invest his

money in some rotten company scheme—heaven knows what!—and as a natural consequence lost every penny. Since then I have heard little about him. He was an artist, but not a rising one; he travelled a great deal in France and Germany, and now and then he would send over pictures to be sold, but I am afraid he made out but a scanty subsistence for himself and his little daughter. A month ago I received news of his death, and as she has not a near relation living, except some cousins in Australia, I find I have the sole charge of a girl of fourteen; and I think you will confess, Miss Lambert, that the position has its difficulties. What in the world”—here Dr. Heriot’s face grew a little comical—“am I to do with a raw school-girl of fourteen?”

“What does Arnold suggest?” asked Mildred, quietly. In her own mind she was perfectly aware what would be her brother’s first generous thought.

“It was my intention to put the child at some good English school, and have her trained as a governess; but it is a dreary prospect for her, poor little soul, and somehow I feel as though I ought to do better for Philip Ellison’s daughter. He was one of the proudest men that ever lived, and was so wrapped up in his child.”

"But my brother has negatived that, and proposed another plan," interrupted Mildred, softly. She knew her brother well.

"He was generous enough to propose that she should go at once to the vicarage until some better arrangement could be made. He assured me that there was ample room for her, and that she could share Olive's and Chrissy's lessons ; but he begged me to refer it to you, as he felt he had no right to make such an addition to the family circle without your full consent."

"Arnold is very good, but he must have known that I could have no objection to offer to any plan of which he approves. He is so kind-hearted, that one could not bear to damp his enthusiasm."

"Yes, but think a moment before you decide," returned Dr. Heriot, earnestly. "It is quite true that I was bound to your brother and his wife by no ordinary ties of friendship, and that they would have done anything for me, but this ought not to be allowed to influence you. If I accept Mr. Lambert's offer, at least for the present, I shall be adding to your work, increasing your responsibilities. Olive and Chrissy will tax your forbearance sufficiently without my bringing this poor little waif of humanity upon your kindness ; and you

look so far from strong,” he continued, with a quick change of tone.

“I am quite ready for my work,” returned Mildred, firmly; “looks do not always speak the truth, Dr. Heriot. Please let me have the charge of your little ward; she will not be a greater stranger to me than Olive and Chrissy are. Why Chrissy was only nine when I saw her last. Ah,” continued Mildred, folding her hands, and speaking almost to herself, “if you knew what it will be to me to see myself surrounded by young faces, to be allowed to love them, and to try to win their love in return—to feel I am doing real work in God’s world, with a real trust and talent given to me—ah! you must let me help you in this, Dr. Heriot; you were so good to Betha, and it will make Arnold happy.” And Mildred stretched out her hand to him with a new impulse, so unlike the composed manner in which she had hitherto spoken, that Dr. Heriot, surprised and touched, could find no response but “God bless you for this, Miss Lambert!”

Mildred’s gentle primness was thawing visibly under Dr. Heriot’s pleasant manners. By and bye, as she presided at the sunny little tea-table, and pressed welcome refreshment on her weary guest,

she heard more about this strange early friendship of his, and shared his surmises as to the probable education and character of his ward.

“She must be a regular Bohemian by this time,” he observed. “From what I can hear they were never long in one place. It must be a strange training for a girl, living in artists’ studios, and being the sole companion of a silent, taciturn man such as Philip was.”

“She will hardly have the characteristics of other girls,” observed Mildred.

“She cannot possibly be more out of the common than Olive. Olive has all sorts of absurd notions in her head. It is odd Mrs. Lambert’s training should have failed so signally in her girls. I am afraid your precision will be sometimes offended,” he continued, looking round the room, which, with all its homeliness, had the little finishes that a woman’s hand always gives. “Olive might have arranged those flowers, but she would have forgotten to water them, or to exclude their presence when dead.”

“You are a nice observer,” returned Mildred, smiling. “Do not make me afraid of my duties beforehand, as though I do not exactly know how all the rooms look! Betha’s pretty drawing-room

trampled by dirty boots, Arnold’s study a hopeless litter of books, not a corner of the writing-table clear. Chrissy used to use them as bricks,” she continued, laughing. “ Roy and she had a mighty Tower of Babel one day. You should have seen Arnold’s look when he found out that ‘The Seven Lamps of Architecture’ laid the foundation ; but Betha only laughed, and told him it served him right.”

“ But she kept them in order, though. In her quiet way she was an excellent disciplinarian. Well, Miss Lambert, I am trespassing over-much on your goodness. To-morrow I am to make my ward’s acquaintance—one of the clique has brought her over from Dieppe—and I am to receive her from his hands. Would it be troubling you too much if I ask you to accompany me?—the poor child will feel so forlorn with only men round her.”

“ I will go with you and bring her home. No, please, do not thank me, Dr. Heriot. If you knew how lonely I am here——” and for the first time Mildred’s eyes filled with tears.

CHAPTER II.

"IF YOU PLEASE, MAY I BRING RAG AND TATTERS?"

"O, my Father's hand,
Stroke heavily, heavily the poor hair down,
Draw, press the child's head closer to thy knee—
I'm still too young, too young, to sit alone."

—*Israels Leigh.*

So this was Polly.

It was only a shabby studio, where poverty and art fought a hand-to-hand struggle for the bare maintenance, but among the after scenes of her busy life Mildred never forgot the place where she first saw Dr. Heriot's ward; it lingered in her memory, a fair, haunting picture as of something indescribably sweet and sad.

Its few accessories were so suggestive of a truer taste made impossible by paucity of success; an unfinished painting all dim greys and pallid, watery blues; a Cain fleeing cut of a blurred outline of clouds; fragmentary snatches of colour warming up pitiless details; rickety chairs and a broken-down table; a breadth of faded tapestry; a jar of jonquils, the form pure Tuscan, the material rough

earthenware ; a mutilated Venus, mutilated but grand, shining out from the dull red background of a torn curtain. A great unfurnished room, full of yellow light and warm sunshine, and, standing motionless in a ladder of motes and beams, with brown eyes drinking in the twinkling glory like a young eagle, was a girl in a shabby black dress, with thin girlish arms clasped across her breast. For a moment Dr. Heriot paused, and he and Mildred exchanged glances ; the young figure in its forlornness came to them like a mournful revelation ; the immobility was superb, the youthful languor pitiful. As Dr. Heriot touched her, she turned on them eyes full of some lost dream, and a large tear that had been gathering unconsciously, brimmed over and splashed down on his hand.

"My child, have we startled you? Mr. Fabian told us to come up." For a moment she looked bewildered. Her thoughts had evidently travelled a long way, but with consciousness came a look of relief and pleasure.

"Oh, I knew you would come—papa told me so. Oh, why have you been so long?—it is three months almost since papa died. Oh, poor papa! poor papa!" and the flush of joy died out of her face as, clasping her small nervous hands round

Dr. Heriot's arm, she laid her face down on them and burst into a passion of tears.

"I sent for you directly I heard ; they kept me in ignorance—have they not told you so ? Poor child, how unkind you must have thought me !" and a grieved look came over Dr. Heriot's face as he gently stroked the closely-cropped head, that felt like the dark, soft plumage of some bird.

"No, I never thought you that," she sobbed. "I was only so lonely and tired of waiting ; and then I got ill, and Mr. Fabian was good to me, and so were the others. But papa had left me to you, and I wanted you to fetch me. You have come to take me home, have you not ?"

She looked up in his face pleadingly as she said this ; she spoke in a voice sweet, but slightly foreign, but with a certain high-bred accent, and there was something unique in her whole appearance that struck her guardian with surprise. The figure was slight and undeveloped, with the irregularity of fourteen ; but the ordinary awkwardness of girlhood was replaced by dignity, almost grace, of movement. She was dark-complexioned, but her face was a perfect oval, and the slight down on the upper-lip gave a characteristic but not unpleasing expression to the mouth, which was firm but

flexible; the hair had evidently been cut off in recent illness, for it was tucked smoothly behind the ears, and was perfectly short behind, which would have given her a boyish look but for the extreme delicacy of the whole contour.

“You have come to take me home, have you not?” she repeated anxiously.

“This lady has,” he replied, with a look at Mildred, who had stood modestly in the background. “I wish I had a home to offer you, my dear; but my wife is dead, and——”

“Then you will want me all the more,” she returned eagerly. “Papa and I have so often talked about you; he told me how good you were, and how unhappy.”

“Hush, Mary,” laying his hand lightly over her lips; but Mildred could see his colour changed painfully. But she interrupted him a little petulantly—

“Nobody calls me Mary, and it sounds so cold and strange.”

“What then, my dear?”

“Why Polly, of course!” opening her brown eyes widely; “I have always been Polly—always.”

“It shall be as you will, my child.”

“How gently you speak! Are you ever irritable,

like papa, I wonder?—he used to be so ill and silent, and then, when we tried to rouse him, he could not bear it. Who is this lady, and why do you say you have no home for me?"

"She means to be our good friend, Polly—there, will that do? But you are such a dignified young lady, I should never have ventured to call you that unasked."

"Why not?" she repeated, darting at him a clear, straightforward glance. Evidently his reticence ruffled her; but Dr. Heriot skilfully evaded the brief awkwardness.

"This lady is Miss Lambert, and she is the sister of one of my best friends; she is going to take charge of his girls and boys, who have lost their mother, and she has kindly offered to take charge of you too."

"She is very good," returned Polly, coldly; "very, very good, I mean," as though she had repented of a slight hauteur. "But I have never had anything to do with children. Papa and I were always alone, and I would much rather live with you; you have no idea what a housekeeper I shall make you. I can dress salad and cook *omelettes*, and Nanette taught me how to make *potage*. I used to take a large basket myself to the

market when we lived at Dresden, when Nanette was so bad with rheumatism.”

“What an astonishing Polly!”

“Ah! you are laughing at me,” drawing herself up proudly, and turning away so that he should not see the tears in her eyes.

“My dear Polly, is that a ‘crime’?”

“It is when people are in earnest. I have said nothing that deserves laughing at—have I, Miss Lambert?” with a sweet, candid glance that won Mildred’s heart.

“No, indeed; I was wishing that my nieces were like you.”

“I did not mean that—I was not asking for praise,” stammered Polly, turning a vivid scarlet. “I only wanted my guardian to know that I should not be useless to him. I can do much more than that. I can mend and darn better than Annette, who was three years older. You are smiling still.”

“If I smile, it is only with pleasure to know my poor friend had such a good daughter. Listen to me, Polly—how old are you?”

“Fourteen last February.”

“What a youthful Polly!—too young, I fear, to comprehend the position. And then with such Bohemian surroundings—that half-crazed painter,

Fabian," he muttered, " and a purblind fiddler and his wife. My poor motherless girl," he continued, laying his hand on her head lightly, and speaking as though moved in spite of himself, " as long as you want a friend, you will never find a truer one than John Heriot. I will be your guardian, adopted father, what you will ; but," with a firmness of voice that struck the girl in spite of herself, " I cannot have you to live with me, Polly."

" Why not ? " she asked, pleadingly.

" Because it would be placing us in a false position ; because I could not incur such a responsibility ; because no one is so fit to take charge of a young girl as a good motherly woman, such as you will find in Miss Lambert." And as the girl looked at him bewildered and disappointed, he continued kindly, " You must forget this pleasant dream, Polly ; perhaps some day, when your guardian is grey-haired, it may come to pass ; but I shall often think how good my adopted daughter meant to be to me."

" Shall I never see you then ? " asked Polly, mournfully.

If these were English ways, the girl thought, what a cold, unlovable place it must be ! Had not Mr. Fabian promised to adopt her if the English

guardian should not be forthcoming? Even Herr Schreiber had offered to keep her out of his poor salary, when her father's death had left her dependent on the little community of struggling artists and musicians. Polly was having her first lesson in the troublesome *convenances* of life, and to the affectionate, ardent girl it was singularly unpalatable.

“I am afraid you will see me every day,” replied her guardian, with much gravity. “I shall not be many yards off—just round the corner, and across the Market-place. No, no, Miss Polly; you will not get rid of me so easily. I mean to direct your studies, haunt your play-time, and be the cross old Mentor, as Olive calls me.”

“Oh, I am so glad!” returned the girl earnestly, and with a sparkle of pleasure in her eyes. “I like you so much already that I could not bear you to do wrong.”

It was Heriot's turn to look puzzled.

“Would it not be wrong,” she returned, answering the look, “when papa trusted me to you, and told me on his death-bed that you would be my second father, if you were to send me right away from you, and take no notice of me at all?”

“I should hardly do that in any case,” returned her guardian, seriously. “What a downright,

unconventional little soul you are, Polly ! You may set your mind at rest ; your father's trust shall be redeemed, his child shall never be neglected by me. But come—you have not made Miss Lambert's acquaintance. I hope you mean to tell her next you like her."

"She looks good, but sad—are you sad?" touching Mildred's sleeve timidly.

"A little. I have been in trouble, like you, and have lost my mother," replied Milly, simply ; but she was not prepared for the suddenness with which the girl threw her arms round her neck and kissed her.

"I might have thought—your black dress and pale face," she murmured remorsefully. "Every one is sad, every one is in trouble—myself, my guardian, and you."

"But you are the youngest—it falls heaviest on you."

"What am I to call you? I don't like Miss Lambert, it sounds stiff," with a little shrug and movement of the hands, rather graceful than otherwise.

"I shall be Aunt Milly to the others, why not to you?" returned Mildred, smiling.

"Ah, that sounds nice. Papa had a sister, only

she died ; I used to call her Aunt Amy. Aunt Milly ! ah, I can say that easily ; it makes me feel at home, somehow. Am I to come home with you to-day, Aunt Milly ?”

“Yes, my dear.” Milly absolutely blushed with pleasure at hearing herself so addressed. “I am not going to my new home for three weeks, but I shall be glad of your company, if you will come and help me.”

“Poor Mr. Fabian will be sorry, but he is expecting to lose me. There is one thing more I must ask, Aunt Milly.”

“A dozen if you will, dear.”

“Oh, but this is a great thing. Oh, please, dear Aunt Milly, may I bring Rag and Tatters ?” And as Mildred looked too astonished for reply, she continued, hurriedly—“Tatters never left papa for an instant, he was licking his hand when he died ; and Rag is such a dear old thing. I could not be happy anywhere without my pets.” And without waiting for an answer she left the room ; and the next instant the light, springy tread was heard in company with a joyous scuffling and barking ; then a large shaggy brown terrier burst into the room, and Polly followed with a great tortoiseshell cat in her arms.

"Isn't Rag handsome, except for this?" touching the animal where a scrap of fur had been rudely mauled off, and presented a bald appearance; "he has lost the sight of one eye too. Veteran Rag, we used to call him. He is so fond of me, and follows me like a dog; he used to go out with me in Dresden, only the dogs hunted him."

"You may bring your pets, Polly," was Mildred's indulgent answer; "I think I can answer for my brother's good-will."

Dr. Heriot shook his head at her laughingly.

"I am afraid you are no rigid disciplinarian, Miss Lambert; but it is 'Love me, love my dog,' with Polly, I expect. Now, my child, you must get ready for the flitting, while I go in search of Mr. Fabian. From the cloud of tobacco-smoke that met us on entering, I fancy he is on the next story."

"He is with the Rogers's, I expect. His model disappointed him, and he is not working to-day. If you will wait a moment, I will fetch him."

"What an original character!" observed Dr. Heriot as the door closed.

"A lovable one," was Mildred's rejoinder. She was interested and roused by the new phase of life presented to her to-day. She looked on amused,

yet touched, when Polly returned, leading by the hand her pseudo-guardian—a tall old man, with fiery eyes and scanty grey hair falling down his neck, in a patched dressing-gown that had once been a gorgeous Turkey-red. It was the first time that the simple woman had gazed on genius down-at-heel, and faring on the dry crust of unrequited self-respect.

“There is my Cain, sir; a new conception—unfinished, if you will—but you may trace the idea I am feebly striving to carry out. Sometimes I fancy it will be my last bit of work. Look at that dimly-traced figure beside the murderer—that is his good angel, who is to accompany the branded one in his lifelong exile. I always believed in Cain’s repentance—see the remorse in his eyes. I caught that expression on a Spanish sailor’s face when he had stabbed his mate in a drunken brawl. I saw my Cain then.”

Needy genius could be garrulous, as Mildred found. The old man warmed at Polly’s open-eyed admiration and Mildred’s softly-uttered praise; appreciation was to him what meat and drink would be to more material natures. He looked almost majestic as he stood before them, in his ragged dressing-gown, descanting on the merits of

his *Tobit*, that had sold for an old song. “A Neapolitan fisher-boy had sat for my angel; every one paints angels with yellow hair and womanish faces, but I am not one of those that must follow the beaten track—I formed my angel on the loftiest ideal of Italian beauty, and got sneered at for my pains. One ought to coin a new proverb now-a-days, Dr. Heriot—originality moves contempt. People said the subject was not a taking one; *Tobit* was too much like an old-clothes man, or a veritable descendant of Moses and Sons. There was no end to the quips and jeers; even our set had a notion it would not do, and I sold it to a dealer at a sum that would hardly cover a month’s rent,” finished the old man, with a mixture of pathos and dignity.

“After all, public taste is a sort of lottery,” observed Dr. Heriot; “true genius is not always requited in this world, if it offends the tender prejudices of preconceived ideas.”

“The worship of the golden image fills up too large a space in the market-place,” replied Mr. Fabian, solemnly, “while the blare of instruments covers the fetish-adoration of its votaries. The world is an eating and drinking and money-getting world, and art, cramped and stifled, goes to the wall.”

“Nay, nay ; I have not so bad an opinion of my generation as all that,” interposed Dr. Heriot, smiling. “I have great faith in the underlying goodness of mankind. One has to break through a very stiff outer-crust, I grant you ; but there are soft places to be found in most natures.” And, as the other shook his head—“Want of success has made you a little down-hearted on the subject of our human charities, Mr. Fabian ; but there is plenty of reverence and art-worship in the world still. I predict a turn of the wheel in your case yet. Cain may still glower down on us from the walls of the Royal Academy.”

“I hope so, before the hand has lost its cunning. But I am too egotistical. And so you are going to take Polly from me—from Dad Fabian, aye ?”—looking at the young girl fondly.

“Indeed, Mr. Fabian, I must thank you for your goodness to my ward. Poor child ! she would have fared badly without it. Polly, you must ask Miss Lambert to bring you to see this kind friend again.”

“Nay, nay ; this is a poor place for ladies to visit,” replied the other, hastily, as he brushed away the fragment of a piece of snuff with a trembling hand ; but he looked gratified, notwithstanding,

standing. "Polly has been a good girl—a very good girl—and weathered gallantly through a very ticklish illness, though some of us thought she would never reach England alive."

"Were you so ill, Polly?" inquired her guardian anxiously.

"Dad Fabian says so; and he ought to know, for he and Mrs. Rogers nursed me. Oh, he was so good to me," continued Polly, clinging to him. "He used to sit up with me part of the night and tell me stories when I got better, and go without his dinner sometimes to buy me fruit. Mrs. Rogers was good-natured, too; but she was noisy. I like Dad Fabian's nursing best."

"You see she fretted for her father," interposed the artist. "Polly's one of the right sort—never gives way while there is work to be done; and so the strain broke her down. She has lost most of her pretty hair. Ellison used to be so proud of her curls; but it suits her, somehow. But you must not keep your new friends waiting, my child. There, God bless you! We shall be seeing you back again here one of these days, I dare say."

Mildred felt as though her new life had begun from the moment the young stranger crossed her threshold. Polly bade her guardian good-bye the

next day with unfeigned regret. "I shall always feel I belong to him, though he cannot have me to live with him," she said, as she followed Mildred into the house. "Papa told me to love him, and I will. He is different, somehow, from what I expected," she continued. "I thought he would be grey-haired, like Papa. He looks younger, and is not tall. Papa was such a grand-looking man, and so handsome; but he has kind eyes — has he not, Aunt Milly? — and speaks so gently."

Mildred was quite ready to pronounce an eulogium on Dr. Heriot. She had already formed a high estimate of her brother's friend; his ready courtesy and highly-bred manners had given her a pleasing impression, while his gentleness to his ward, and a certain lofty tone of mind in his conversation, proved him a man of good heart and of undoubted ability. There was a latent humour at times discernible, and a certain caustic wit, which, tinged as it was with melancholy, was highly attractive. She felt that a man who had contrived to satisfy Betha's somewhat fastidious taste could not fail to be above the ordinary standard, and, though she did not quite echo Polly's enthusiasm, she was able to respond sympathetically to the girl's louder praise.

Before many days were over Polly had transferred a large portion of loving allegiance to Mildred herself. Women—that is, ladies—had not been very plentiful in her small circle. One or two of the artists' wives had been kind to her; but Polly, who was an aristocrat by nature, had rather rebelled against their want of refinement, and discovered flaws which showed that, young as she was, she had plenty of discernment.

“Mrs. Rogers was noisy, and showed all her teeth when she laughed, and tramped as she walked—in this way;” and Polly brought a very slender foot to prove the argument. And Mrs. Hornby? Oh, she did not care for Mrs. Hornby much—“she thought of nothing but smart dresses, and dining at the restaurant, and she used such funny words—what men use, you know. Papa never cared for me to be with her much; but he liked Mrs. Rogers, though she fidgeted him dreadfully.”

Mildred listened, amused and interested, to the girl's prattle. The young creature on the stool at her feet was conversant with a life of which she knew nothing, except from books. Polly would chatter for hours together of picture-galleries and museums, and little feasts set out in illuminated gardens, and of great lonely churches with swinging

lamps, and little tawdry shrines. Monks and nuns came familiarly into her reminiscences. She had had *gateau* and cherries in a convent-garden once, and had swung among apple-blossoms in an orchard belonging to one.

"I used to think I should like to be a nun once," prattled Polly, "and wear a great white flapping cap, as they did in Belgium. Sœur Marie used to be so kind. I shall never forget that long, straight lime-walk, where the girls used to take their recreation, or sit under the cherry-trees with their lace-work, while Sœur Marie read the lives of the saints. Do you like reading the lives of the saints, Aunt Milly? I don't. They are glorious, of course; but it pains me to know how uncomfortable they made themselves."

"I do not think I have ever read any, Polly."

"Have you not?"—with a surprised arching of the brows. "Sœur Marie thought them the finest books in the world. She used to tell me stories of many of them; and her face would flush and her eyes grow so bright, I used to think she was a saint herself."

Mildred rarely interrupted the girl's narratives; but little bits haunted her now and then, and lingered in her memory with tender persistence.

What sober prose her life seemed in contrast to that of this fourteen-years' old girl! How bare and empty seemed her niche compared to Polly's series of pictures! How clearly Mildred could see it all! The wandering artist-life, in search of the beautiful, poverty gripping less sadly on the mind when refreshed by novel scenes of interest; the grave, taciturn Philip Ellison, banishing himself and his pride in a self-chosen exile, and training his motherless child to the same exclusiveness.

The few humble friends, grouped under the same roof, and sharing the same obscurity; stretching out the right hand of fellowship, which was grasped, not cordially, but with a certain protest, the little room which Polly described so graphically was not half so favourite a resort as the one where Dad Fabian was painting his *Tobit*.

“It was only after Papa got so ill that Mrs. Rogers would bring up her work and sit with us. Papa did not like it much; but he was so heavy that I could not lift him alone, and, noisy as she was, she knew how to cheer him up. Dad suited Papa best: they used to talk so beautifully together. You have no idea how Dad can talk, and how clever he is. Papa used to say he was one of nature's gentlemen. His father was only a working

man, you know ; " and Polly drew herself up with a gesture Mildred had noticed before, and which was to draw upon her later the *soubriquet* of " the princess."

" I think none the less of him for that," returned Mildred, with gentle reproof.

" You are not like Papa then," observed Polly, with one of her pretty gestures of dissent. " It fretted him so being with people not nice in their ways. The others would call him milord, and laugh at his grand manners ; but all the same they were afraid of him ; every one feared him but I ; and I only loved him," finished Polly, with one of her girlish outbursts of emotion, which could only be soothed by extra petting on Mildred's part.

Mildred's soft heart was full of compassion for the lonely girl. Polly, who cried herself to sleep every night for the longing for her lost father, often woke to find Mildred sitting beside her bed watching her.

" You were sleeping so restlessly, I thought I would look in on you," was all she said ; but her motherly kiss spoke volumes.

" How good you are to me, Aunt Milly," Polly would say to her sometimes. " I am getting to love you more every day ; and then your voice is

so soft, and you have such nice ways. I think I shall be happy living with you, and seeing my guardian every day ; but we don't want Olive and Chrissy, do we ?"—for Mildred had described the vicarage and its inhabitants—"it will feel as though we were in a beehive after this quiet little nest," as she observed once. Mildred smiled, as she always did over Polly's quaint speeches, which were ripe at times with an old-fashioned wisdom, gathered from the stored garner of age. She would ponder over them sometimes in her slow way, when the girl was sleeping her wet-eyed sleep.

Would it come to her to regret the quietness of life which she was laying by for ever as a garment that had galled and fretted her?—that life she had inwardly compared to a dead mill-stream, flecked only by the shadow and sunlight of perpetually recurring days? Would there come a time when the burthen and heat of the day would oppress her?—when the load of existence would be too heavy to bear, and even this retrospect of faint grey distances would seem fair by contrast?

Women who lead contemplative and sedentary lives are over-much given to this sort of morbid self-questioning. They are for ever examining the spiritual mechanism of their own natures, with

the same result as though one took up a feeble and growing plant by the root to judge of its progress. They spend labour for that which is not bread. By and by, out of the vigour of her busy life, Mildred learnt the wholesome sweetness of a motto she ever afterwards cherished as her favourite: *Laborare est orare*. Polly's questions, direct or indirect, sometimes ruffled the elder woman's tranquillity, however gently she might put them by. “Were you ever a girl, Aunt Milly?—a girl like me, I mean?” And as Mildred bit her lip and coloured slightly at a question that would have galled any woman of eight-and-twenty, she continued, caressingly, “You are so nice; only just a trifle too solemn. I think, after all, I would rather be Polly than you. You seem to have had no pictures in your life.”

“My dear child, what do you mean?” returned Mildred; but she spoke with a little effort.

“I mean, you don't seem to have lived out pretty little bits, as I have. You have walked every day over that common and down those long white sunny roads, where there is nothing to imagine, unless one stares up at the clouds—just clouds and dust and wheel-ruts. You have never gone through a forest by moonlight, as I have, and

stopped at a little rickety inn, with a dozen *Jäger* drinking *lager-bier* under the linden-trees, and the peasants dancing in their *sabots* on a strip of lawn. You have never——” continued Polly breathlessly; but Mildred interrupted her.

“Stop, Polly; I love your reminiscences; but I want to ask you a question. Is that all you saw in our walk to-day—clouds and dust and wheel-ruts?”

“I saw a hand-organ and a lazy monkey, and a brass band, driving me frantic. It made me feel—oh, I can’t tell you how I felt,” returned Polly, with a grimace, and putting up her hands to her delicate little ears.

“The music was bad, certainly; but I found plenty to admire in our walk.”

Polly opened her eyes. “You are not serious, Aunt Milly.”

“Let me see: we went across the common, and then on. My pictures are very humble ones, Polly; but I framed at least half-a-dozen for my evening’s refreshment.”

Polly drew herself up a little scornfully. “I don’t admire monkeys, Aunt Milly.”

“What sort of eyes have you, child?” replied Mildred, who had recovered her cheerfulness. “Do

you mean that you did not see that old blind man with the white beard, and, evidently, his little grand-daughter, at his knees, just before we crossed the common?"

"Yes; I noticed she was a pretty child," returned Polly, with reluctant candour.

"She and her blue hood and tippet, and the great yellow mongrel dog at her feet, made a pretty little sketch, all by themselves; and then, when we went on a little farther, there was the old gipsy-woman, with a handsome young ne'er-do-weel of a boy. Let me tell you, Polly, Mr. Fabian would have made something of his brown skin and rags. Oh, what rags!"

"She was a horrid old woman," put in Polly, rather crossly.

"Granted; but, with a clump of fir-trees behind her, and a bit of sunset-clouds, she made up a striking picture. After that we came on a flock of sheep. One of them had got caught in a furze-bush, and was bleating terribly. We stood looking at it for full a minute before the navvy kindly rescued it."

"I was sorry for the poor animal, of course. But, Aunt Milly, I don't call that much of a picture."

"Nevertheless, it reminded me of the one that hangs in my room. To my thinking it was highly suggestive; all the more, that it was an old sheep, and had such a foolish, confiding face. We are never too old to go astray," continued Mildred, dreamily.

"Three pictures, at least we have finished now," asked Polly, impatiently.

"Finished! I could multiply that number three-fold! Why, there was the hay-stack, with the young heifers round it; and that red-tiled cottage, with the pigeons tumbling and wheeling round the roof, and the flower-girl asleep on my own doorstep, with the laburnum shedding its yellow petals on her lap, to the great delight of the poor sickly baby. Come, Polly; who made the most of their eyes this evening? Only clouds, dust, and wheel-ruts, eh?"

"You are too wise for me, Aunt Milly. Who would have thought you could have seen all that? Dad Fabian ought to have heard you talk! We must go out to-morrow evening, and you shall show me some more pictures. But doesn't it strike you, Aunt Milly"—leaning her dimpled chin on her hand—"that you have made the most of very poor material? After all"—triumphantly—"there is not much in your pictures!"

CHAPTER III.

VIA TEBAY.

“ All the land in flowing squares,
Beneath a broad and equal blowing wind,
Smelt of the coming summer, as one large cloud
Drew downward; but all else of heaven was pure
Up to the sun, and May from verge to verge,
And May with me from head to heel.

To left and right
The cuckoo told his name to all the hills,
The mellow ouzel fluted in the elm,
The redcap whistled, and the nightingale
Sung loud, as though he were the bird of day.”

Tennyson.

“AUNT MILLY, I can breathe now. Oh, how beautiful!” and Polly clapped her hands with girlish glee, as the train slowly steamed into Tebay Junction, the grey old station lying snugly among the green Westmorland hills.

“Oh, my dear, hush! who is that tall youth taking off his hat to us? not Roy, surely, it must be Richard. Think of not knowing my own nephews!” and Mildred looked distressed and puzzled.

"Now, Aunt Milly, don't put yourself out; if this stupid door would only open, I would get out and ask him myself. Oh, thank you," as the youth in question hurried forward to perform that necessary service, looking at her, at the same time, rather curiously. "If you please, Aunt Milly wants to know if you are Roy or Richard."

"Roy," was the prompt answer. "What, are you Polly, and is that Aunt Milly behind you? For shame, Aunt Milly, not to know me when I took my hat off to you at least three minutes ago;" but Roy had the grace to blush a little over this audacious statement as he helped Mildred out, and returned her warm grasp of the hand.

"My dear boy, how could you have known us, and Polly, a perfect stranger, too?"

Roy burst into a ringing laugh.

"Why you see, Aunt Milly, one never loses by a little extra attention; it always pays in the long run. I just took off my hat at random as the train came in sight, and there, as it happened, was Polly's face glued against the window. So I was right, and you were gratified!"

"Now I am sure it is Roy."

"Roy, Rex, or Sauce Royal, as they called me at Sedbergh. Well, Miss Polly," with another

curious look, “we are *bond fide* adopted cousins, as Dr. John says, so we may as well shake hands.”

“Humph,” was Polly’s sole answer, as she gave her hand with the air of a small duchess, over which Roy grimaced slightly; and then with a cordial inflexion of voice, as he turned to Mildred—

“Welcome to Westmorland, Aunt Milly—both of you, I mean; and I hope you will like us, as much as we shall like you.”

“Thank you, my boy; and to think I mistook you for Richard! How tall you have grown, Royal.”

“Ah, I was a bit of a lad when you were down here last. I am afraid I should not have recognised you, Aunt Milly, but for Polly. Well, what is it? you look disturbed; there is a vision of lost boxes in your eyes; there, I knew I was right; don’t be afraid, we are known here, and Bentley will look after all your belongings.”

“But how long are we to remain? Polly is tired, poor child, and so am I.”

“You should have came by York, as Richard told you; always follow Richard’s advice, and you will never do wrong, so he thinks; now you have two hours to wait, and yourself to thank, and only my pleasing conversation to while away the time.”

"You hard-hearted boy; can't you see Aunt Milly is ready to drop?" broke in Polly, indignantly; "how were we to know you lived so near the North Pole? My guardian ought to have met us," continued the little lady, with dignity; "he would have known what to have done for Aunt Milly."

Roy stared, and then burst into his ready, good-humoured laugh.

"Whew! what a little termagant! Of course you are tired, women always are; take my arm, Aunt Milly; lean on me; now we will go and have some tea; let us know when the train starts, Bentley, and look us out a comfortable compartment;" and, so saying, Roy hurried his charges away; Mildred's tired eyes resting admiringly on the long range of low, grey buildings, picturesque, and strangely quiet, backed by the vivid green of the great circling hills, which, to the eyes of southerners, invested Tebay Junction with unusual interest.

The refreshment-room was empty; there was a pleasant jingling of cups and spoons behind the bar; in a twinkling the spotless white tablecloth was covered with home-made bread, butter, and ham, and even Polly's brow cleared like magic as

she sipped her hot tea, and brought her healthy girlish appetite to bear on the tempting Westmorland cakes.

"There, Dr. John or Dick himself couldn't be a better squire of dames," observed Roy, complacently. "Aunt Milly, when you have left off admiring me, just close your eyes to your surroundings a little while—it will do you no end of good."

Roy was rattling on almost boisterously, Mildred thought; but she was right in attributing much of it to nervousness. Roy's light-heartedness was assumed for the time; in reality, his sensitive nature was deeply touched by this meeting with his aunt; his four-months'-old trouble was still too recent to bear the least allusion. Betha's children were not likely to forget her, and Roy, warmly as he welcomed his father's sister, could not fail to remember whose place it was she would try so inadequately to fill. Jokes never came amiss to Roy, and he had the usual boyish dislike to show his feelings; but he was none the less sore at heart, and the quick impatient sigh that was now and then jerked out in the brief pauses of conversation spoke volumes to Mildred.

"You are so like your mother," she said, softly; but the boy's lip quivered, and he turned so pale,

that Mildred did not venture to say more ; she only looked at him with the sort of yearning pride that women feel in those who are their own flesh and blood.

“ He is not a bit like Arnold, he is Betha’s boy,” she thought to herself ; “ her ‘ long laddie,’ as she used to call him. I dare say he is weak and impulsive. Those sort of faces generally tell their own story pretty correctly ; ” and the thought crossed her, that perhaps one of Dad Fabian’s womanish angels might have had the fair hair, long pale face, and sleepy blue eyes, which were Roy’s chief characteristics, and which were striking enough in their way.

Polly, who had soon got over her brief animosity, was now chattering to him freely enough.

“ I think you will do, for a country boy,” she observed, patronisingly ; “ people who live among the mountains are generally free and easy, and not as polished as those who live in cities,” continued Polly, uttering this sententious plagiarism as innocently as though it were the product of her own wisdom.

“ Such kind of borrowing as this, if it be not bettered by the borrower, among good authors, is accounted plagiarism ; see Milton,” said the boy,

fresh from Sedbergh, with a portentous frown, assumed for the occasion. "Name your reference. I repel such vile insinuations, Miss Polly, as I am a Westmorland boy."

"I learnt that in my dictation," returned Polly, vexed, but too candid for reticence; "but Dad Fabian used to say the same thing; please don't stroke Veteran Rag the wrong way, he does not like it."

"Poor old Veteran, he has won some scars, I see. I am afraid you are a character, Polly. Rag and Tatters, and copy-book wisdom, well-thumbed and learnt, and then retailed as the original article. I wish Dr. John could hear you, he would put you through your paces."

"Who is Dr. John?" asked Polly, coming down a little from her stilts, and evidently relenting in favour of Roy's handsome face.

"Oh, Dr. John is Dr. John, unless you choose to do as the world does, and call him Dr. Heriot; he is Dr. John to us; after all, what's in a name?"

"I like my guardian to be called Dr. Heriot best; the other sounds disrespectful and silly."

"We did not know your opinion before, you see," returned Roy, with a slight drawl, and almost closing his eyes; "if you could have telegraphed

your wish to us three or four years ago it might have been different ; but with the strict conservative feeling prevalent at the vicarage, I am afraid Dr. John it will remain, unless," meditating deeply ; " but no, he might not like it."

" What ? "

" Well, we might make it Dr. Jack, you know."

" After all, boys are nothing but plagues," returned Polly, scornfully.

" ' Playa, plaga, plague, *et cetera, et cetera*, that which smites or wounds ; any afflictive evil or calamity ; a great trial or vexation ; also an acute malignant febrile disease, that often prevails in Egypt, Syria, and Turkey, and that has at times prevailed in the large cities of Europe, with frightful mortality ; hence any pestilence.' Have you swallowed Webster's *Dictionary*, Polly ? "

" My dears, I hope you do not mean to quarrel already ? "

" We are only sounding the depths of each other's wisdom. Polly is awfully shallow, Aunt Milly ; the sort of person, you know, who utilises all the scraps. Wait till she sits at the feet of Gamaliel ; Dr. John, I mean ; he is the one for finding out ' all is not gold that glitters.' "

Mildred smiled. " Let them fight it out," she thought ; " no one can resist long the charm of

Polly's perfect honesty, and her pride is a little too thin-skinned for daily comfort; good-natured raillery will be a wholesome tonic. What a clever boy he is! only seventeen, too," and she shook her head indulgently at Roy.

"Kirkby Stephen train starts, sir; all the luggage in; this way for the ladies."

"Quick-march; down with you, Tatters; lie there, good dog. Don't let the grass grow under your feet, Aunt Milly; there's a providential escape for two tired and dusty Londoners. Next compartment, Andrews," as the red-coated guard bore down on their carriage. "There, Aunt Milly," with an exquisite consideration that would have become Dr. John himself, "I have deferred an introduction to the squire himself."

"My dear Roy, how thoughtful of you. I am in no mood for introductions, certainly," returned Mildred, gratefully.

"Women never are unless they have on their best bonnets; and, to tell you the truth," continued the incorrigible Roy, "Mr. Trelawny is the sort of man for whom one always furbishes up one's company manners. As Dr. John says, there is nothing slip-shod, or in *deshabille*, in him. Everything about him is so terribly perfect."

"Roy, Roy, what a quiz you are!"

“Hush, there they come ; the Lady of the Towers herself, Ethel the Magnificent ; the weaver of yards of flimsy verse, patched with rags and shreds of wisdom, after Polly’s fashion. Did you catch a glimpse of our notabilities, Aunt Milly ?”

Mildred answered yes ; she had caught a glimpse over Roy’s shoulder of a tall, thin, aristocratic-looking man ; but the long sweep of silk drapery and the outline of a pale face were all that she could see of the lady with him.

She began to wish that Roy would be a little less garrulous as the train moved out of Tebay station, and bore them swiftly to their destination ; she was nerving herself for the meeting with her brother, and the sight of the vicarage without the presence of its dearly-loved mistress, while the view began to open so enchantingly before them on either side, that she would willingly have enjoyed it in silence. But Polly was less reticent, and her enthusiasm pleased Roy.

“ You see we are in the valley of the Lune,” he explained, his grandiloquence giving place to boyish earnestness. “ Ours is one of the loveliest spots in the whole district. Now we are at the bottom of Ravenstone-dale, out of which it used to be said that the people would never allow a good cow to

go, or a rich heiress to be taken ; and then we shall come to Smardale Gill. Is it not pretty, with its clear little stream running at the bottom, and its sides covered with brushwood ? Now we are in my father's parish," exclaimed Roy, eagerly, as the train swept over the viaduct. " And now look out for Smardale Hall on the right ; once the residents were grand enough to have a portion of the church to themselves, and it is still called Smardale Chapel ; the whole is now occupied by a farmhouse. Ah, now we are near the station. Do you see that castellated building ? that is Kirkleatham House, the Trelawneys' place. Now look out for Dick, Aunt Milly. There he is ! I thought so, he has spotted the lady of the Towers."

" My dear, is that Richard ? " as a short and rather square-shouldered young man, but decidedly good-looking, doffed his straw hat in answer to some unseen greeting, and then peered inquiringly into their compartment.

" Ah, there you are, Rex. Have you brought them ? How do you do, Aunt Milly ? Is that young lady with you Miss Ellison ? " and he shook hands rather formally, and without looking at Polly. " I hope you did not find your long stay at Tebay very wearisome. Did you give them some

tea, Rex ? That's right. Please come with me, Aunt Milly ; our waggonette is waiting at the top of the steps."

"Oh, Richard, I wish you were not all such strangers to me !" Mildred could not have helped that involuntary exclamation which came out of the fulness of her heart. Her elder nephew was walking gravely by her side, with slow even strides ; he looked up a little surprised.

"I suppose we must be that. After seven years' absence you will find us all greatly changed of course. I remember you perfectly, but then I was fourteen when you paid your last visit."

"You remember me ? I hardly expected to hear you say that," and Mildred felt a glow of pleasure which all Roy's friendliness had not called forth.

"You are looking older—and as Dr. Heriot told us, somewhat ill ; but it is the same face of course. My father will be glad to welcome you, Aunt Milly."

"And you ?"

His dark face flushed, and he looked a little discomfited. Mildred felt sorry she had asked the question, it would offend his reticence.

"It is early days for any of us to be glad about anything," he returned with effort. "I think for my father's, and the girls' sake, your coming could

not be too soon ; you will not complain of our lack of welcome I hope, though some of us may be a little backward in acting up to it."

"He is speaking of himself," thought Mildred, and she answered the unspoken thought very tenderly. "You need not fear my misunderstanding you, Richard ; if you will let me be your friend as well as the others', I shall be glad : but no one can fill her place."

He started, and drew his straw hat nervously over his brow. "Thank you, Aunt Milly," was all he said, as he placed her in the waggonette, and took the driver's seat on the box.

"There are changes even here, Aunt Milly," observed Roy, who had seated himself opposite to her for the purpose of making pertinent observations on the various landmarks they passed, and he pointed to the long row of modern stuccoed and decidedly third-class villas springing up near the station. "The new line brings this. We are in the suburbs of Kirkby Stephen, and I dare say you hardly know where you are ;" a fact which Mildred could not deny, though recognition dawned on her senses, as the low stone houses and whitewashed cottages came in sight ; and then the wide street paved with small blue cobbles out of the river, and

small old-fashioned shops, and a few grey bay-windowed houses bearing the stamp of age, and well-worn respectability. Ah, there was the market-place, with the children playing as usual round the old pump, and the group of loiterers sunning themselves outside the Red Lion. Through the grating and low archway of the empty butter-market Mildred could see the grass-grown paths and gleaming tombstones and the grey tower of the grand old church itself. The approach to the vicarage was singularly ill-adapted to any but pedestrians. It required a steady hand and eye to guide a pair of spirited horses round the sharp angles of the narrow winding alley, but the little country-bred browns knew their work. The vicarage gates were wide open, and two black figures were shading their eyes in the porch. But Richard, instead of driving in at the gate, reined in his horses so suddenly that he nearly brought them on their haunches, and leaning backward over the box, pointed with his whip across the road.

“There is my father taking his usual evening stroll—never mind the girls, Aunt Milly. I dare say you would rather meet him alone.”

Mildred stood up and steadied herself by laying a hand on Richard’s shoulder. The sun was

setting, and the grey old church stood out in fine relief in the warm evening light, blue breadths of sky behind it, and shifting golden lines of sunny clouds in the distance, while down the quiet paths, bareheaded and with hands folded behind his back, was a tall stooping figure, with scanty grey hair falling low on his neck, walking to and fro, with measured, uneven tread.

The hand on Richard's shoulder shook visibly ; Mildred was trembling all over.

“ Arnold ! Oh, how old he looks ! How thin and bowed ! Oh, my poor brother.”

“ You must make allowance for the shock he has had—that we have all had,” returned Richard in a soothing tone. “ He always walks like this, and at the same time. Go to him, Aunt Milly, it does him good to be roused.”

Mildred obeyed, though her limbs moved stiffly ; the little gate swung behind her ; a tame goat browsing among the tombs bleated and strained at its tether as she passed ; but the figure she followed still continued its slow, monotonous walk.

Mildred shrunk back for a moment into the deep church porch to pause and recover herself. At the end of the path there were steps and an unused gate leading to the market ; he must turn then.

How quiet and peaceful it all looked ! The dark range of school buildings buried in shadow, the sombre line of houses closing in two sides of the churchyard. Behind the vicarage the purple-rimmed hills just fading into indistinctness. Up and down the stone alley some children were playing, one wee toddling mite was peeping through the railings at Mildred. The goat still bleated in the distance ; a large blue-black terrier swept in hot pursuit of his master.

“ Ah, Pupsie, have you found me ? The evenings are chilly still ; so, so, old dog, we will go in.”

Mildred waited for a moment and then glided out from the porch—he turned, saw her, and held out his arms without a word.

Mr. Lambert was the first to recover himself ; for Mildred’s tears, always long in coming, were now falling like rain.

“ A sad welcome, my dear ; but there, she would not have us grieving like this.”

“ Oh, Arnold, how you have suffered ! I never realised how much, till Richard stopped the horses, and then I saw you walking alone in the churchyard. The dews are falling, and you are bareheaded. You should take better care of yourself, for the children’s sake.”

“Ay, ay; just what she said; but it has grown into a sort of habit with me. Cardie comes and fetches me in, night after night; the lad is a good lad; his mother was right after all.”

“Dear Betha; but you have not laid her here, Arnold?”

He shook his head.

“I could not, Mildred, though she wished it as much as I did. She often said she would like to lie within sight of the home where she had been so happy, and under the shadow of the church porch. She liked the thought of her children’s feet passing so near her on their way to church, but I had no power to carry out her wish.”

“You mean the churchyard is closed?”

“Yes, owing to the increase of population, the influx of railway labourers, and the union work-house, deaths in the parish became so numerous, that there was danger of overcrowding. She lies in the cemetery.”

“Ah! I remember.”

“I do not think her funeral will ever be forgotten; people came for miles round to pay their last homage to my darling. One old woman

over eighty came all the way from Castlesteads to see her last of 'the gradely leddy,' as she called her. You should have seen it, to know how she was loved."

"She made you very happy while she lived, Arnold!"

"Too happy!—look at me now. I have the children, of course, poor things; but in losing her, I feel I have lost the best of everything, and must walk for ever in the shadow."

He spoke in the vague musing tone that had grown on him of late, and which was new to Mildred—the worn, set features and grey hair contrasted strangely with the vivid brightness of his eyes, at once keen and youthful; he had been a man in the prime of life, vigorous and strong, when Mildred had seen him last; but a long illness and deadly sorrow had wasted his energy, and bowed his upright figure, as though the weight were physical as well as mental.

"But this is a poor welcome, Milly; and you must be tired and starved after your day's journey. You are not looking robust either, my dear—not a trace of the old blooming Milly" (touching her thin cheek sorrowfully). "Well, well, the children must take care of you, and we'll get Dr. Heriot

to prescribe. Has the child come with you after all?"

Mildred signified assent.

"I am glad of it. Thank you heartily for your ready help, Milly; we would do anything for Heriot; the boys treat him as a sort of elder brother, and the girls are fond of him, though they lead him a life sometimes. He is very grateful to you, and says you have lifted a mountain off him. Is the girl a nice girl, eh?"

"I must leave you to judge of that. She has interested me, at any rate; she is thoroughly lovable."

"She will shake down among the others, and become one of us, I hope. Ah! well, that will be your department, Mildred. I am not much to be depended on for anything but parish matters. When a man loses hope and energy it is all up with him."

The little gate swung after them as he spoke; the flower-bordered courtyard before the vicarage seemed half full of moving figures as they crossed the road; and in another moment Mildred was greeting her nieces, and introducing Polly to her brother.

"I cannot be expected to remember you both,"

she said, as Olive timidly, and Christine rather coldly, returned her kiss. " You were such little girls when I last saw you."

But with Mildred's tone of benevolence there mingled a little dismay. Betha's girls were decidedly odd.

Olive, who was a year older than Polly, and who was quite a head taller, had just gained the thin ungainly age, when to the eyes of anxious guardians the extremities appear in the light of afflictive dispensations ; and premature old age is symbolised by the rounded and stooping shoulders, and sunken chest ; the age of trodden-down heels and ragged finger-ends, when the glory of the woman, as St. Paul calls it, instead of being coiled into smooth knots, or swept round in faultless plaits, of coroneted beauty, presents a vista of frayed ends and multitudinous hair-pins. Olive's loosely-dropping hair and dark cloudy face gave Mildred a shock ; the girl was plain too, though the irregular features beamed at times with a look of intelligence. Christine, who was two years younger, and much better-looking, in spite of a rough, yellowish mane, had an odd, original face, a pert nose, argumentative chin, and restless dark eyes, which already looked critically

at persons and things. "Contradiction Chriss," as the boys called her, was certainly a character in her way.

"Are you tired, aunt? Will you come in?" asked Olive, in a low voice, turning a dull sort of red as she spoke. "Cardie thinks you are, and supper is ready, and——"

"I am very tired, dear, and so is Polly," answered Mildred, cheerfully, as she followed Olive across the dimly-lighted hall, with its old-fashioned fireplace and settles; its tables piled up with coats and hats, which had found their way to the harmonium too.

They went up the low, broad staircase Mildred remembered so well, with its carved balustrades and pretty red and white drugget, and the great blue China jars in the window recesses.

The study door stood open, and Mildred had a glimpse of the high-backed chair, and table littered over with papers, before she began ascending again, and came out into the low-ceiled passage, with deep-set lattice windows looking on the court and churchyard.

"Chrissy and I sleep here," explained Olive, panting slightly from nervousness, as Mildred looked inquiringly at her. "We thought, at least Cardie

thought, this little room next to us would do for Miss Ellison."

Polly peeped in delightedly. It was small, but cosy, with a curiously-shaped bedstead—the head having a resemblance to a Latin cross, with three pegs covered with white dimity. The room was neatly arranged—a decided contrast to the one they had just passed; and there was even an effort at decoration, for the black bars of the grate were entwined with sprays of honesty—the shining, pearly leaves grouped also in a tall red jar, on the mantelpiece.

"That is a pretty idea. Was it yours, Olive?"

Olive nodded. "Father thought you would like your old room, aunt—the one he and mother always called yours."

The tears came again in Mildred's eyes. Somehow it seemed but yesterday since Betha welcomed her so warmly, and showed her the room she was always to call hers. There was the tiny dressing-room, with its distant view, and the quaint old-fashioned room, with an oaken beam running across the low ceiling, and its wide bay-window.

There was the same heartsease paper that Mildred remembered seven years ago, the same flowery chintz, the curious old quilt, a hundred

years old, covered with twining carnations. The very fringe that edged the beam spoke to her of a brother's thoughtfulness, while the same hand had designed the motto which from henceforth was to be Mildred's own—" *Laborare est orare.*"

"The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places," whispered Mildred as she drew near the window, and stood there spell-bound by the scene, which, though well remembered, seemed to come before her with new beauty.

Underneath her lay the vicarage garden, with its terrace walk and small, trim lawn; and down below, half hidden by a steep wooded bank, flowed the Eden, its pebbly beach lying dry under the low garden wall, but further on plashing with silvery gleams through the thick foliage.

To the right was the foot-bridge leading to the meadows, and beyond that the water-mill and the weir; and as far as eye could reach, green uplands and sweeps of pasturage, belted here and there with trees; and closing in the distance soft ranges of fells, ridge beyond ridge, fading now into grey indistinctness, but glorious to look upon when the sun shone down upon their "paradise of purple and the golden slopes atween them," or the storm clouds, lowering over them, tinged them with darker violet.

“A place to live in and die in,” thought Mildred, solemnly, as the last thing that night she stood looking out into the moonlight.

The hills were invisible now, but gleams of watery brightness shone between the trees, and the garden lay flooded in the silver light. A light wind stirred the foliage with a soft southing movement, and some animal straying to the river to drink trod crisply on the dry pebbles.

“A place where one should think good thoughts and live out one's best life,” continued Mildred, dreamily. A sigh, almost a groan, from beneath her open window seemed to answer her unspoken thought; and then a dark figure moved quietly away. It was Richard!

CHAPTER IV.

MILDRED'S NEW HOME.

“ Half drowned in sleepy peace it lay,
As satiate with the boundless play
Of sunshine on its green array.
And clear-cut hills of gloomy blue,
To keep it safe, rose up behind,
As with a charmèd ring to bind
The grassy sea, where clouds might find
A place to bring their shadows to.”

Jean Ingelow.

“ AUNT MILLY, I have wakened to find myself in Paradise,” were the first words that greeted Mildred’s drowsy senses the next morning; and she opened her eyes to find the sun streaming in through the great uncurtained window, and Polly in her white dressing-gown, curled up on the low chair, gazing out in rapturous contemplation.

“ It must be very early,” observed Mildred, wearily. She was fatigued with her journey and the long vigil she had kept the preceding night, and felt a little discontented with the girl’s bird-like activity.

"One ought not to be tired in Paradise," returned Polly, reprovingly. "Do people have aches and pains and sore hearts here, I wonder—in the valley of the Eden, as he called it—and yet Mr. Lambert looks sad enough, and so does Richard. Do you like Richard, Aunt Milly?"

"Very much," returned Mildred, with signs of returning animation in her voice.

"Well, he is not bad—for an icicle," was Polly's quaint retort; "but I like Roy best; he is tiresome, of course—all boys are—but oh, those girls, Aunt Milly!"

"Well, what of them?" asked Mildred, in an amused voice. "I am sure you could not judge of them last night, poor things; they were too shy."

"They were dreadful. Oh, Aunt Milly, don't let us talk of them!"

"I am sure O'live is clever, Polly; her face is full of intelligence. Christine is a mere child."

Polly shrugged her shoulders. She did not care to argue on such an uninteresting question. The little lady's dainty taste was offended by the somewhat uncouth appearance of the sisters. She changed the subject deftly.

"How the birds are singing! I think the star-

lings are building their nests under the roof, they are flying in and out and chirping so busily. How still it is on the fells ! There is an old grey horse feeding by the bridge, and some red and white cattle coming over the side of the hill. This is better than your old Clapham pictures, Aunt Milly."

Mildred smiled ; she thought so too.

" Roy says the river is a good way below, and that it is rather a dangerous place to climb. He thinks nothing of it—but then he is a boy ! How blue the hills are this morning ! They look quite near. But Roy says they are miles away. That long violet one is called the Nine Standards, and over there are Hartley Fells. We were out on the terrace last night, and he told me their names. Roy is very fond of talk, I think ; but Richard stood near us all the time, and never said a word, except to scold Roy for chattering so much."

" Richard was afraid the sound of your voices would disturb my brother."

" That is the worst of it, as Roy says, Richard is always in the right. I don't think Roy is unfeeling, but he forgets sometimes ; he told me so himself. We had quite a long talk when the others went in."

" You and he seem already very good friends."

" Yes, he is a tolerably nice boy," returned Polly, condescendingly ; " and we shall get on very well together, I dare say. Now I will leave you in peace, Aunt Milly, to finish dressing ; for I mean to make acquaintance with that big green hill before breakfast."

Mildred was not sorry to be left in peace. It was still early. So, while Polly wetted her feet in the grass, Mildred went softly downstairs to refresh her eyes and memory with a quiet look at the old rooms in their morning freshness.

The door of her brother's study stood open, and she ventured in, almost holding her breath, lest her step should reach his ear in the adjoining room.

There was the chair where he always sat, with his grey head against the light, the one narrow old-fashioned window framing only a small portion of the magnificent prospect. There were the over-flowing waste-paper baskets, as usual, brimming over their contents on the carpet—the table a hopeless chaos of documents, pamphlets, and books of reference.

There were some attempts at arrangement in the well-filled book-cases that occupied two sides of

the small room, but the old corner behind the mother's chair and work-table still held the *débris* of the renowned Tower of Babel, and a family tendency to draw out the lower books without removing the upper ones had resulted in numerous overthrows, so that even Mr. Lambert objected to add to the dusty confusion.

Books and papers were everywhere ; they littered even the couch—that couch where Betha had lain for so many months, only tired, before they discovered what ailed her—the couch where her husband had laid the little light figure morning after morning, till she had grown too ill to be moved even that short distance.

Looking round, Mildred could understand the growing helplessness of the man who had lost his right hand and helpmeet ; the answer and ready sympathy that never failed him were wanting now ; the comely, bright presence had gone from his sight ; the tones that had always vibrated so sweetly in his ear were silent for ever. With his lonely broodings there must ever mix a bitter regret, and the dull, perpetual anguish of a yearning never to be satisfied. Earth is full of these desolations, which come alike on the evil and the good, mysteries of suffering never to be understood

here, but which, to such natures as Arnold Lambert's, are but as the Refiner's furnace, purging the dross of earthly passion and centring them on things above.

Instinctively Mildred comprehended this, as her eye fell on the open pages of the Bible—the Bible that had been her husband's wedding gift to Betha, and in which she had striven to read with failing eyes the very day before her death.

Mildred touched it reverently and turned away.

She lingered for a moment in the dining-room, where a buxom North-countrywoman was laying the table for breakfast. Everything here was unchanged.

It was still the same homely, green, wainscotted room, with high, narrow windows looking on to the terrace. There was the same low, old-fashioned sideboard and silk-lined chiffonnier; the same leather couch and cumbrous easy-chair; the same picture of "Virtue and Vice," smiling and glaring over the high wooden mantelpiece. Yes, the dear old room, as Mildred had fondly termed it in her happy three months' visit, was exactly the same; but Betha's drawing-room was metamorphosed into fairyland.

All Arnold's descriptions had not prepared her

for the pleasant surprise. Behind the double folding-doors lay a perfect picture-room, its wide bay looking over the sunny hills, and a glass door opening on the beck gravel of the courtyard.

Outside, the long levels of green, with Cuyp-like touches of brown and red cattle, grouped together on the shady bank, tender hints of water gleaming through the trees, and the soft billowy ridges beyond ; within, the faint purple and golden tints of the antique jars and vases, and shelves of rare porcelain, the rich hues of the china harmonising with the high-backed ebony chairs and cabinet, and the high, elaborately-finished mantelpiece, curiously inlaid with glass, and fitted up with tiny articles of *vertu* ; the soft, blue hangings and Sèvres table and other dainty finishes giving a rich tone of colour to the whole. Mr. Lambert was somewhat of a *dilettante*, and his accurate taste had effected many improvements in the vicarage, as well as having largely aided in the work nearest his heart—the restoration of his church.

The real frontage of the vicarage looked towards the garden terrace and Hillsbottom, the broad meadow that stretched out towards Hartley Fells, with Hartley Fold Farm and Hartley Castle in the distance ; from its upper window the Nine

Standards and Mallerstang ; and to the south Wild-boar Fells were plainly visible. But the usual mode of entrance was at the back. The gravelled sweep of courtyard, with its narrow grass bordering and flower-bed, communicated with the outhouses and stable-yard by means of a green door in the wall. The part of the vicarage appropriated to the servants' use was very old, dating, it is said, from the days of Henry VIII., and some of the old windows were still remaining. Mildred remembered the great stone kitchen and rambling cellarage and the cosy housekeeper's room, where Betha had distilled her fragrant waters and tied up her preserves. As she passed down the long passage leading to the garden-door she could see old Nan, bare-armed and bustling, clattering across the stones in her country clogs, the sunny back-yard distinctly visible. Some hens were clucking round a yellow pan ; the goat bleated from the distance ; the white tombstones gleamed in the morning sun ; a scythe cut crisply through the wet grass ; a fleet step on the gravel behind the little summer-house lingered and then turned.

“ You are early, Aunt Milly—at least, for a Londoner, though we are early people here, as you will find. I hope you have slept well.”

“Not very well ; my thoughts were too busy. Is it too early to go over to the church yet, Richard ?”

“The bells will not ring for another half-hour, if that is what you mean ; but the key hangs in my father’s study. I can take you over if you wish.”

“No, do not let me hinder you,” glancing at the Greek lexicon he held in his hand.

“Oh, my time is not so valuable as that,” he returned, good-humouredly. “Of course you must see the restoration ; it is my father’s great work, and he is justly proud of it. If you go over, Aunt Milly, I will be with you in a minute.”

Mildred obeyed, and waited in the grand old porch till Richard made his appearance, panting, and slightly disturbed.

“It was mislaid, as usual. When you get used to us a little more, Aunt Milly, you will find that no one puts anything in its proper place. It used not to be so,” he continued, in a suppressed voice ; “but we have got into sad ways lately ; and Olive is a wretched manager.”

“She is so young, Richard. What can you expect from a girl of fifteen ?”

“I have seen little women and little mothers at that age,” he returned, with brusque quaintness.

“ Some girls, placed as she is, would be quite different ; but Livy cares for nothing but books.”

“ She is clever then ? ”

“ I suppose so,” indifferently. “ My father says so, and so did——” (he paused, as though the word were difficult to utter)—“ but—but she was always trying to make her more womanly. Don’t you think clever women are intolerable, Aunt Milly ? ”

“ Not if they have wise heads and good hearts ; but they need peculiar training. Oh, how solemn and beautiful ! ” as Richard at last unlocked the door ; and they entered the vast empty church, with the morning sun shining on its long aisles and glorious arcades.

Richard’s querulous voice was hushed in tender reverence now, as he called Mildred to admire the highly-decorated roof and massive pillars, and pointed out to her the different parts that had been restored.

“ The nave is Early English, and was built in 1220 ; the north aisle is of the original width, and was restored in Perpendicular style ; the window at the eastern end is Early English too. The south aisle was widened about 1500, and has been

restored in the Perpendicular ; and the transepts are Early English, in which style the chancel also has been rebuilt. Nothing of the original remains except the Sedilia, probably late Early English, or perhaps the period sometimes called Wavy, or Decorated."

" You know it all by heart, Richard. How grand those arches are ; the church itself is almost cathedral-like in its vast size."

" We are very fond of it," he returned, gravely. " Do you recollect this chapel ? It is called the Musgrave Chapel. One of these tombs belonged to Sir Thomas Musgrave, who is said to have killed the last wild boar seen in these parts, about the time of Edward III."

" Ah ! I remember hearing that. You are a capital guide, Richard."

" Since my father has been ill, I have always taken strangers over the church, and so one must be acquainted with the details. This is the Wharton Chapel, Aunt Milly ; and here is the tomb of Lord Thomas Wharton and his two wives ; it was built as a mortuary chapel, in the reign of Elizabeth, so my father says. Ah ! there is the bell, and I must go into the vestry and see if my father be ready."

“ You have not got a surpliced choir yet, Richard ? ”

He shook his head. ’

“ We have to deal with northern prejudices ; you have no idea how narrow and bigoted some minds can be. I could tell you of a parish, not thirty miles from here, where a sprig of holly in the church at Christmas would breed a riot.”

“ Impossible, Richard ! ”

“ You should hear some of the Squire’s stories about twenty years ago ; these are enlightened times compared to them. We are getting on tolerably well, and can afford to wait ; our daily services are badly attended. There is the vicarage pew, Aunt Milly ; I must go now.”

Only nineteen — Richard’s manliness was absolutely striking ; how wise and sensible he seemed, and yet what underlying bitterness there was in his words, as he spoke of Olive. “ His heart is sore, poor lad, with missing his mother,” thought Mildred, as she watched the athletic figure, rather strong than graceful, cross the broad chancel ; and then, as she sat admiring the noble pulpit of Shap granite and Syenetic marble, the vicarage pew began slowly to fill, and two or three people took their places.

Mildred stole a glance at her nieces: Olive looked heavy-eyed and absent; and Chriss more untidy than she had been the previous night. When service had begun she nudged her aunt twice, once to say Dr. Heriot was not there, and next that Roy and Polly had come in late, and were hiding behind the last pillar. She would have said more, but Richard frowned her into silence. It was rather a dreary service; there was no music, and the responses, with the exception of Richard's, were inaudible in the vast building; but Mildred thought it restful, though she grieved to see that her brother's worn face looked thinner and sadder in the morning light, and his tall figure more bowed and feeble.

He waited for her in the porch, where she lingered behind the others, and greeted her with his old smile; and then he took Richard's arm.

“We have a poor congregation you see, Mildred; even Heriot was not there.”

“Is he usually?” she asked, somewhat quickly.

“I have never known him miss, unless some bad case has kept him up at night. He joined us reluctantly at first, and more to please us than himself; but he has grown into believing there is no fitter manner of beginning the day; his example

has infected two or three others, but I am afraid we rarely number over a dozen. We do a little better at six o'clock."

"It must be very disheartening to you, Arnold."

"I do not permit myself to feel so; if the people will not come, at least they do not lack invitation—twice a day the bells ring out their reproachful call. I wish Christians were half as devout as Mahometans."

"Mrs. Sadler calls it new-fangled nonsense, and says she has not time to be always in church," interrupted Chrissy, in her self-sufficient treble.

"My little Chriss, it is not good to repeat people's words. Mrs. Sadler has small means and a large family, and the way she brings them up is highly creditable." But his gentle reproof fell unheeded.

"But she need not have told Miss Martingale that she knew you were a Ritualist at heart, and that the daily services were unnecessary innovations," returned Chrissy, stammering slightly over the long words.

"Now, Contradiction, no one asked for this valuable piece of information," exclaimed Roy, with a warning pull at the rough tawny mane; "little girls like you ought not to meddle in parish

matters. You see Gregory has been steadily at work this morning, father," pointing to the long swathes of cut grass under the trees ; "the church-yard will be a credit to us yet."

But Roy's good-natured artifice to turn his father's thoughts into a pleasanter channel failed to lift the cloud that Chrissy's unfortunate speech had raised.

"Innovations ! new-fangled ideas ! " he muttered, in a grieved voice, "simple obedience—that I dare not, on the peril of a bad conscience, withhold, to the rules of the Church, to the loving precept that bids me gather her children in to morning and evening prayer."

"Contradiction, you deserve half-a-dozen pinches for this," whispered Roy ; "you have set him off on an old grievance."

"Never sacrifice principles, Cardie, when you are in my position," continued Mr. Lambert. "If I had listened to opposing voices, our bells would have kept silence from one Sunday to another. Ah, Milly ! I often ask myself, 'Can these dry bones live ?' The husks and tares that choke the good seed in these narrow minds that listen to me Sunday after Sunday would test the patience of any faithful preacher."

"Aunt Milly looks tired, and would be glad of her breakfast," interposed Richard.

Mildred thanked him silently with her eyes ; she knew her brother sufficiently of old to dread the long vague self-argument that would have detained them for another half-hour in the porch had not Richard's dexterous hint proved effectual. Mildred learnt a great deal of the habits of the family during the hour that followed ; the quiet watchful eyes made their own observation—and though she said little, nothing escaped her tender scrutiny. She saw her brother would have eaten nothing, but for the half-laughing, half-coaxing attentions of Roy, who sat next him. Roy prepared his egg, and buttered his toast, and placed the cresses daintily on his plate, unperceived by Mr. Lambert, who was opening his letters and glancing over his papers.

When he had finished—and his appetite was very small—he pushed away his plate, and sat looking over the fells, evidently lost in thought. But his children, as though accustomed to his silence, took no further notice of him, but carried on the conversation among themselves, only dropping their voices when a heavier sigh than usual broke upon their ears. The table was spread with

a superabundance of viands that surprised Mildred ; but the cloth was not over clean, and was stained with coffee in several places. Mildred fancied that it was to obviate such a catastrophe for the future that Richard sat near the urn. A German grammar lay behind the cups and saucers, and Olive munched her bread and butter very ungracefully over it, only raising her head when querulous or reproachful demands for coffee roused her reluctant attention, and it evidently needed Richard's watchfulness that the cups were not returned unsweetened to their owner.

"There, you have done it again," Mildred heard him say in a low voice. "The second clean cloth this week disfigured with these unsightly brown patches."

"Something must be the matter with the urn," exclaimed Olive, looking helplessly with regretful eyes at the mischief.

"Nonsense, the only fault is that you will do two things at a time. You have eaten no breakfast, at least next to none, and made us all uncomfortable. And pray how much German have you done?"

"I can't help it, Cardie ; I have so much to do, and there seems no time for things."

“I should say not, to judge by this,” interposed Roy, wickedly, executing a pirouette round his sister’s chair, to bring a large hole in his sock to view. “Positively the only pair in my drawers. It is too hard, isn’t it, Dick?”

But Richard’s disgust was evidently too great for words, and the unbecoming flush deepened on Olive’s sallow cheeks.

“I was working up to twelve o’clock at night,” she said, looking ready to cry, and appealing to her silent accuser. “Don’t laugh, Chriss, you were asleep; how could you know?”

“Were you mending this?” asked her brother gravely, holding up a breadth of torn crape for her inspection, fastened by pins, and already woefully frayed out.

“I had no time,” still defending herself heavily, but without temper. “Please leave it alone, Cardie, you are making it worse. I had Chriss’s frock to do; and I was hunting for your things, but I could not find them.”

“I dare say not. I dare not trust myself to your tender mercies. I took a carpet-bag full down to old Marget. If Rex took my advice, he would do the same.”

“No, no, I will do his to-day. I will indeed,

Rex. I am so sorry about it. Chriss ought to help me, but she never does, and she tears her things so dreadfully," finished Olive, reproachfully.

"What can you expect from a contradicting baby," returned Roy, with another pull at the ill-kempt locks as he passed. Chriss gave him a vixenish look, but her aunt's presence proved a restraining influence. Evidently Chriss was not a favourite with her brothers, for Roy teased, and Richard snubbed her pertness severely. Roy, however, seemed to possess a fund of sweet temper for family use, which was a marked contrast to Richard's dictatorial and somewhat stern manner, and he hastened now to cover poor Olive's discomfiture.

"Never mind, Livy, a little extra ventilation is not unhealthy, and is a somewhat wholesome discipline ; you may cobble me up a pair for to-morrow if you like."

"You are very good, Roy, but I am sorry all the same, only Cardie will not believe it," returned Olive. There were tears in the poor girl's voice, and she evidently felt her brother's reproof keenly.

"Actions are better than words," was the curt reply. "But this is not very amusing for Aunt

Milly. What are you and Miss Ellison going to do with yourselves this morning ? ”

“ Bother Miss Ellison ; why don’t you call her Polly ? ” burst in Roy, irreverently.

“ I have not given him leave,” returned the little lady haughtily. “ You were rude, and took the permission without asking.”

“ Nonsense, don’t be dignified, Polly ; it does not suit you. We are cousins, aren’t we ? brothers and sisters once removed ? ”

“ I am Aunt Milly’s niece ; but I am not to call him Uncle Arnold, am I ? ” was Polly’s unexpected retort. But the shout it raised roused even Mr. Lambert.

“ Call me what you like, my dear ; never mind my boy’s mischief,” laying his hand on Roy’s shoulder caressingly. “ He is as skittish and full of humour as a colt ; but a good lad in the main.”

Polly contemplated them gravely, and pondered the question ; then she reached out a little hand and touched Mr. Lambert timidly.

“ No ! I will not call you Uncle Arnold, it does not seem natural. I like Mr. Lambert best. But Roy is nice, and may call me what he likes ; and Richard, too, if he will not be so cross.”

“ Thanks, my princess,” answered Roy, with

mocking reverence. "So you don't approve of Dick's temper, eh?"

"I think Olive stupid to bear it; but he means well," returned Polly composedly. And as Richard drew himself up affronted at the young stranger's plain speaking, she looked in his face, in her frank, childish way, "Cardie is prettier than Richard, and I will call you that if you like, but you must not frown at me and tell me to do things as you tell Olive. I am not accustomed to be treated like a little sheep," finished Polly, naïvely; and Richard, despite his vexed dignity, was compelled to join in the laugh that greeted this speech.

"Polly and I ought to unpack," suggested Mildred, in her wise matter-of-fact way, hoping to restore the harmony that every moment seemed to disturb.

"No one will invade your privacy to-day, Aunt Milly; it would be a violation of county etiquette to call upon strangers till they had been seen at church. You and Miss——" Richard paused awkwardly, and hurried on—"You will have plenty of time to settle yourself and get rested."

"Fie, Dick—what a blank. You are to be nameless now, Polly."

"Don't be so insufferably tiresome, Rex; one

can never begin a sensible conversation in this house what with Chriss's contradictions on one side and your jokes on the other."

"Poor old Issachar between two burdens," returned Roy, patting him lightly. "Cheer up; don't lose heart; try again, my lad. Aunt Milly, when you have finished with Polly, I want to show her Podgill, our favourite wood; and Olive and Chriss shall go too."

"Wait till the afternoon, Roy, and then we can manage it," broke in Chriss, breathlessly.

"You can go, Christine, but I have no time," returned Olive wearily; but as Richard seemed on the point of making some comment, she gathered up her books, and stumbling heavily over her torn dress in her haste, hurried from the room.

Mildred and Polly shut themselves in their rooms, and were busy till dinner-time. Once or twice when Mildred had occasion to go downstairs she came upon Olive; once she was standing by the hall table jingling a basket of keys, and evidently in weary argument on domestic matters with Nan, Nan's broad Westmorland dialect striking sharply against Olive's feeble refined key.

"Titter its dune an better, Miss Olive—t' butcher

will send fleshmeat sure enough, but I maun gang and order it mysel."

"Very well, Nan, but it must not be that joint ; Mr. Richard does not like it, and——"

"Eh ! I cares lile for Master Richard," grumbled Nan, crossly. "T'auld maister is starved amyast —a few broth will suit him best."

"But we can have the broth as well," returned Olive, with patient persistence. "Mamma always studied what Richard liked, and he must not feel the difference now."

"Nay, then, I maun just gang butcher's mysel, and see after it."

But Mildred heard no more. By-and-by, as she was sorting some books on the window seat, she saw Chrissy scudding across the courtyard, and Olive following her with a heavy load of books in her arms ; the elder girl was plodding on with downcast head and stooping shoulders, the unfortunate black dress trailing unheeded over the rough beck gravel, and the German grammar still open in her hand.

CHAPTER V.

OLIVE.

“ The yearnings of her solitary spirit, the out-gushings of her shrinking sensibility, the cravings of her alienated heart, are indulged only in the quiet holiness of her solitude. The world sees not, guesses not the conflict, and in the ignorance of others lies her strength.”—*Bethmont*.

DINNER was hardly a sociable meal at the vicarage. Olive was in her place looking hot and dusty when Mildred came downstairs, and Chriss tore in and took her seat in breathless haste, but the boys did not make their appearance till it was half over. Richard immediately seated himself by his aunt, and explained the reason of their delay in a low tone, though he interrupted himself once by a few reproachful words to Olive on the comfortless appearance of the room.

“ It is Chriss’s fault,” returned Olive. “ I have asked her so often not to bring all that litter in at dinner-time ; and, Chriss, you have pulled down the blind too.”

Richard darted an angry look at the offender, which was met defiantly, and then he resumed the

subject, though with a perturbed brow. Roy and he had been over to Musgrave to read classics with the vicar. Roy had left Sedbergh, and since their trouble their father had been obliged to resign this duty to another. "He was bent on preparing me for Oxford himself, but since his illness, he has occupied himself solely with parish matters. So Mr. Wigram offered to read with us for a few months, and as the offer was too good a one to be refused, Roy and I walk over three or four times a week."

"Have you settled to 'take Holy Orders then, Richard ?'" asked Mildred, a little surprised.

"It has been settled for me, I believe," he returned, a slight hardness perceptible in his voice ; "at least it is my father's great wish, and I have not yet made up my mind to disappoint him, though I own there is a probability of my doing so."

"And Roy ?"

Richard smiled grimly. "You had better ask him ; he is looked upon in the light of a sucking barrister, but he is nothing but a dabbler in art at present ; he has been under a hedge most of the morning, taking the portrait of a tramp that he chose to consider picturesque. Where is your

Zingara, Roy?" But Roy chose to be deaf, and went on eagerly with his plans for the afternoon's excursion to Podgill.

Mildred watched the party set out, Polly and Chriss in their broad-brimmed hats, and Roy with a sketch-book under his arm. Richard was going over to Nateby with his father. Olive looked after them longingly.

"My dear, are you not going too? it will do you good; and I am sure you have a headache."

"Oh, it is nothing," returned Olive, putting her hair back with her hands; "it is so warm this afternoon, and——"

"And you were up late last night," continued Mildred, in a sympathising voice.

"Not later than usual. I often work when the others go to bed; it does not hurt me," she finished hastily, as a dissenting glance from Mildred met her. "Indeed, I am quite strong, and able to bear much more."

"We must not work the willing horse, then. Come, my dear, put on your hat; or let me fetch it for you, and we will overtake the Podgill party."

"Oh no," returned Olive, shrinking back, and colouring nervously. "You may go, aunt; but

Rex does not want me, or Chriss either ; nobody wants me — and I have so much work to do."

" What sort of work, mending ? "

" Yes, all the socks and things. I try to keep them under, but there is a basketful still. Roy and Chriss are so careless, and wear out their things ; and then you heard Richard say he could not trust me with his."

" Richard is particular ; many young men are. You must not be so sensitive, Olive. Well, my dear, I shall be very glad of your help, of course ; but these things will be my business now."

Olive contracted her brow in a puzzled way.
" I do not understand."

" Not that I have come to be your father's housekeeper, and to save your young shoulders from being quite weighed down with burthens too heavy for them ? There, come into my room, and let us talk this matter over at our leisure. Our fingers can be busy at the same time ; " and drawing the girl gently to a low seat by the open window, Mildred placed herself beside her, and was soon absorbed in the difficulties of a formidable rent.

" You must be tired too, aunt," observed Olive

presently, with an admiring glance at the erect figure and nimble fingers.

“ Not too tired to listen if you have anything to tell me,” returned Mildred with a winning smile. “ I want to hear where all those books were going this morning, and why Chriss was running on empty-handed.”

“ Chriss does not like carrying things, and I don’t mind,” replied Olive. “ We go every morning, and in the afternoon too when we are able, to study with Mrs. Cranford; she is so nice and clever. She is a Frenchwoman, and has lived in Germany half her life; only she married an Englishman.”

“ And you study with her ? ”

“ Yes, Dr. Heriot recommended her; she was a great friend of his, and after her husband’s death—he was a lawyer here—she was obliged to do something to maintain herself and her three little girls, so Dr. Heriot proposed her opening a sort of school; not a regular one, you know, but just morning and afternoon classes for a few girls.”

“ Have you many companions ? ”

“ No; only Gertrude Sadler and the two Misses Northcote. Polly is to join us, I believe.”

"So her guardian says. I hope you like our young *protégée*, Olive."

"I shall not dislike her, at least, for one reason," and as Mildred looked up in surprise, she added more graciously, "I mean we are all so fond of Dr. Heriot that we will try to like her for his sake."

"Polly deserves to be loved for her own sake," replied Mildred, somewhat piqued at Olive's coldness. "I was wrong to ask you such a question. Of course you cannot judge of any one in so short a time."

"Oh, it is not that," returned Olive, eager, and yet stammering. "I am afraid I am slow to like people always, and Polly seems so bright and clever, that I am sure never to get on with her."

"My dear Olive, you must not allow yourself to form such morbid ideas. Polly is very original, and will charm you into liking her, before many days are over; even our fastidious Richard shows signs of relenting."

"Oh, but he will never care for her as Roy seems to do already. Cardie cares for so few people; you don't half know how particular he is, and how soon he is offended; nothing but perfection will ever please him," she finished with a sigh.

“We must not be too hard in our estimate of other people. I am half inclined to find fault with Richard myself in this respect ; he does not make sufficient allowance for a very young housekeeper,” laying her hand softly on Olive’s dark hair ; and as the girl looked up at her quickly, surprised by the caressing action, Mildred noticed, for the first time, the bright intelligence of the brown eyes.

“Oh, you must not say that,” she returned, colouring painfully. “Cardie is very good, and helps me as much as he can ; but you see he was so used to seeing mamma do everything so beautifully.”

“It is not worse for Richard than for the others.”

“Oh yes, it is ; she made so much of him, and they were always together. Roy feels it dreadfully ; but he is light-hearted, and forgets it at times. I don’t think Cardie ever does.”

“How do you know ; does he tell you so ?” asked Mildred, with kindly scrutiny.

Olive shook her head mournfully. “No, he never talks to me, at least in that way ; but I know it all the same ; one can tell it by his silence and pained look. It makes him irritable too. Roy has terrible breaks-down sometimes, and so has Chriss ; but no one knows what Cardie suffers.”

Mildred dropped her work, and regarded the young speaker attentively. There was womanly thoughtfulness, and an underlying tenderness in the words of this girl of fifteen ; under the timid reserve there evidently beat a warm, affectionate heart. For a moment Mildred scanned the awkward hunching of the shoulders, the slovenly dress and hair, and the plain, cloudy face, so slow to beam into anything like a smile ; Olive's normal expression seemed a heavy, anxious look, that furrowed her brow with unnatural lines, and made her appear years older than her actual age ; the want of elasticity and the somewhat slouching gait confirming this impression.

“ If she were not so plain ; if she would only dress and hold herself like other people, and be a little less awkward,” sighed Mildred. “ No wonder Richard’s fastidiousness is so often offended ; but his continual fault-finding makes her worse. She is too humble-minded to defend herself, and too generous to resent his interference. If I do not mistake, this girl has a fine nature, though it is one that is difficult to understand ; but to think of this being Betha’s daughter ! ” and a vision rose before Mildred of the slight, graceful figure and active movements of the bright young house-

mother, so strangely contrasted with Olive's clumsy gestures.

The silence was unbroken for a little time, and then Olive raised her head. "I think I must go down now, the others will be coming in. It has been a nice quiet time, and has done my head good; but," a little plaintively, "I am afraid I have not done much work."

Mildred laughed. "Why not? you have not looked out of the window half so often as I have. I suppose you are too used to all that purple loveliness; your eyes have not played truant once."

"Yes, it is very beautiful; but one seems to have no time now to enjoy," sighed the poor drudge. "You work so fast, aunt; your fingers fly. I shall always be awkward at my needle; mamma said so."

"It is a pity, of course; but perhaps your talents lie in another direction," returned her aunt, gravely. "You must not lose heart, Olive. It is possible to acquire ordinary skill by persevering effort."

"If one had leisure to learn—I mean to take pains. But look, how little I have done all this afternoon." Olive looked so earnest and lugubrious that Mildred bit her lip to keep in the amused smile.

"My dear," she returned quaintly, "there is a sin not mentioned in the Decalogue, but which is a very common one among women, nevertheless, 'the lust of finishing.' We ought to love work for the work's sake, and leave results more than we do. Over-hurry and too great anxiety for completion has a great deal to do with the over-wrought nerves of which people complain now-a-days. 'In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.' "

Olive looked up with something like tears in her eyes. "Oh, aunt, how beautiful. I never thought of that."

"Did you not? I will illuminate the text for you and hang it in your room. So much depends on the quietness we bring to our work; without being exactly miserly with our eyes and hands, as you have been this afternoon, one can do so much with a little wise planning of our time, always taking care not to resent interference by others. You will think I deal in proverbial philosophy, if I give you another maxim, 'Man's importunity is God's opportunity.' "

"I will always try to remember that when Chriss interrupts me, as she does continually," answered Olive, thoughtfully. "People say there are no such things as conflicting duties, but I have often

such hard work to decide—which is the right thing to be done.”

“I will give you an infallible guide then: choose that which seems hardest, or most disagreeable; consciences are slippery things; they always give us such good reasons for pleasing ourselves.”

“I don’t think that would answer with me,” returned Olive doubtfully. “There are so many things I do not like, the disagreeable duties quite fill one’s day. I like hearing you talk very much, aunt. But there is Cardie’s voice, and he will be disappointed not to find the tea ready when he comes in from church.”

“Then I will not detain you another moment; but you must promise me one thing.”

“What is that?”

“There must be no German book behind the urn to-night. Better ill-learnt verbs than jarring harmony, and a trifle that vexes the soul of another ceases to be a trifle. There, run along, my child.”

Mildred had seen very little of her brother that day, and after tea she accompanied him for a quiet stroll in the churchyard. There was much that she had to hear and tell. Arnold would fain know the particulars of his mother’s last hours from her lips, while she on her side yearned for a fuller par-

ticipation in her brother's sorrow, and to gather up the treasured recollections of the sister she had loved so well.

The quiet evening hour—the scene—the place—fitted well with such converse. Arnold was less reticent to-night, and though his smothered tones of pain at times bore overwhelming testimony to the agony that had shattered his very soul, his expressions of resignation, and the absence of anything like bitterness in the complaint that he had lost his youth, the best and brightest part of himself, drew his sister's heart to him in endearing reverence.

“I was dumb, and opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it,” seemed to be the unspoken language of his thoughts, and every word breathed the same mournful submission to what was felt to be the chastisement of love.

“Dear, beautiful Betha; but she was ready to go, Arnold ?”

“None so ready as she—God forbid it were otherwise—but I do not know. I sometimes think the darling would have been glad to stay a little longer with me. Hers was the nature that saw the sunny side of life. Heriot could never make her share in his dark views of earthly troubles. If

the cloud came she was always looking for the silver lining."

"It is sad to think how rare these natures are," replied Mildred. "What a contrast to our mother's sick-bed!"

"Ah, then we had to battle with the morbidity of hypochondria, the sickness of the body aggravated by the diseased action of the mind, the thickening of shadows that never existed except in one weary brain. My darling never lost her happy smile except when she saw my grief. I think that troubled the still waters of her soul. In thinking of their end, Mildred, one is reminded of Bunyan's glorious allegory—glorious, inspired, I should rather say. That part where the pilgrims make ready for their passage across the river. My darling Betha entered the river with the sweet bravery of Christiana, while, according to your account, my poor mother's sufferings only ceased with her breath."

"Yet she was praying for the end to come Arnold."

"Yes, but the grasshopper was ever a burden to her. Do you remember what stout old Bunyan says? 'The last words of Mr. Despondency were: Farewell night! Welcome day! His daughter

(Much-afraid) went through the river singing, but no one could understand what she said.' "

" As no one could tell the meaning of the sweet solemn smile that crossed our mother's face at the last ; she had no fears then, Arnold."

" Just so. If she could have spoken she would have doubtless told you that such was the case, or used such words as Mr. Despondency leaves as his dying legacy. Do you remember them, Mildred ? They are so true of many sick souls," and he quoted in a low, sweet voice, "' My will and my daughter's is (that tender, loving Much-afraid, Milly), that our despends and slavish fears be by no man ever received from the day of our departure for ever, for I know after my death they will offer themselves to others. For, to be plain with you, they are ghosts which we entertained when we first began to be pilgrims, and could never throw them off after ; and they will walk about and seek entertainment of the pilgrims ; but, for our sakes, shut the doors upon them.' "

" It is a large subject, Arnold, and a very painful one."

" It is one on which you should talk to Heriot ; he has a fine benevolence, and is very tender in his dealings with these self-tormentors. He

is always fighting the shadows, as he calls them."

"I have often wondered why women are so much more morbid than men."

"Their lives are more to blame than they; want of vigour and action, a much-to-be-deplored habit of incessant introspection and a too nice balancing of conscientious scruples, a lack of large-mindedness, and freedom of principle. All these things lie at the root of the mischief. As John Heriot has it, 'The thinking machine is too finely polished.'

"I fancy Olive is slightly bitten with the complaint," observed Mildred, wishing to turn her brother's thoughts to more practical matters.

"Indeed! her mother never told me so. She once said Olive was a noble creature in a chrysalis state, and that she had a mind beyond the generality of girls, but she generally only laughed at her for a bookworm, and blamed her for want of order. I don't profess to understand my children," he continued mournfully, "their mother was everything to them. Richard often puzzles me, and Olive still more. Roy is the most transparent, and Christine is a mere child. It has often struck me lately that the girls are in sad need

of training. Betha was over-lenient with them, and Richard is too hard at times."

"They are at an angular age," returned his sister, smiling. "Olive seems docile, and much may be made of her. I suppose you wish me to enter on my new duties at once, Arnold?"

"The sooner the better, but I hope you do not expect me to define them?"

"Can a mother's duties be defined?" she asked, very gravely.

"Sweetly said, Milly. I shall not fear to trust my girls to you after that. Ah, there comes Master Richard to tell us the dews are falling."

Richard gave Mildred a reproachful look as he hastened to his father's side.

"You have let him talk too much; he will have no sleep to-night, Aunt Milly. You have been out here more than two hours, and supper is waiting."

"So late, Cardie? Well, well; it is something to find time can pass otherwise than slowly now. You must not find fault with your aunt, she is a good creature, and her talk has refreshed me. I hope, Milly, you and my boy mean to be great friends."

"Do you doubt it, sir?" asked Richard gravely.

"I don't doubt your good heart, Cardie, though

your aunt may not always understand your manner," answered his father gently. " Youth is sometimes narrow-minded and intolerant, Milly. One graduates in the school of charity later in life."

" I understand your reproof, sir. I am aware you consider me often overbearing and dogmatical, but in my opinion petty worries would try the temper of a saint."

" Pin-pricks often repeated would be as bad as a dagger-thrust, and not nearly so dignified. Never mind, Cardie, many people find toleration a very difficult duty."

" I could never tolerate evils of our own making, and what is more, I should never consider it my duty to do so. I do not know that you would have to complain of my endurance in greater matters."

" Possibly not, Cardie. This boy of mine, Milly," pressing the strong young arm on which he leant, " is always leading some crusade or other. He ought to have lived centuries ago, and belted on his sword as a Red Cross Knight. He would have brought us home one of the dragon's heads at last."

" You are jesting," returned Richard, with a forced smile.

“A poor jest, Cardie, then ; only clothing the truth in allegory. After all, you are right, my boy, and I am somewhat weary ; help me to my study. I will not join the others to-night.”

Richard’s face so plainly expressed “I told you so,” that Mildred felt a warm flush come to her face, as though she had been discovered in a fault. It added to her annoyance also to find on inquiry that Olive had been shut up in her room all the evening, “over Roy’s socks,” as Chrissy explained, while the others had been wandering over the fells at their own sweet will.

“This will never do, you will be quite ill, Olive,” exclaimed Mildred, impatiently ; but as Richard entered that moment, to fetch some wine for his father, she forbore to say any more, only entering a mental resolve to kidnap the offending basket and lock it up safely from Olive’s scrupulous fingers.

“I am coming into your room to have a talk,” whispered Polly when supper was over ; “I have hardly seen you all day. How I do miss not having my dear Aunt Milly to myself.”

“I don’t believe you have missed me at all, Polly,” returned Mildred, stroking the short hair, and looking with a sort of relief into the bright

piquant face, for her heart was heavy with many sad thoughts.

“ Roy and I have been talking about you, though ; he has found out you have a pretty hand, and so you have.”

“ Silly children.”

“ He says you are awfully jolly. That is the schoolboy jargon he talks ; but he means it too ; and even Chriss says you are not so bad, though she owned she dreaded your coming.”

Mildred winced at this piece of unpalatable intelligence, but she only replied quietly, “ Chrissy was afraid I should prove strict, I suppose.”

“ Oh, don’t let us talk of Chriss,” interrupted Polly, eagerly ; “ she is intolerable. I want to tell you about Roy. Do you know, Aunt Milly, he wants to be an artist.”

“ Richard hinted as much at dinner-time.”

“ Oh, Richard only laughs at him, and thinks it is all nonsense ; but I have lived among artists all my life,” continued Polly, drawing herself up, “ and I am quite sure Roy is in earnest. We were talking about it all the afternoon, while Chrissy was hunting for bird-nests. He told me all his plans, and I have promised to help him.”

"It appears his father intends him to be a barrister."

"Yes; some old uncle left him a few hundred pounds, and Mr. Lambert wished him to go to the University, and, as he had no vocation for the Church, to study for the bar. Roy told me all about it; he cannot bear disappointing his father, but he is quite sure that he will make nothing but an artist."

"Many boys have these fancies. You ought not to encourage him in it against his father's wish."

"Roy is seventeen, Aunt Milly; as he says, he is no child, and he draws such beautiful pictures. I have told him all about Dad Fabian, and he wants to have him here, and ask his advice about things. Dad could look after Roy when he goes to London. Roy and I have arranged everything."

"My dear Polly," began Mildred, in a reproving tone; but her remonstrance was cut short, for at that instant loud sobs were distinctly audible from the farthest room, where the girls slept.

Mildred rose at once, and softly opened the door; at the same moment there was a quick step on the stairs, and Richard's low, admonishing voice reached her ear; but as the loud sobbing

sounds still continued, Mildred followed him in unperceived.

"Hush, Chrissy. What is all this about? You are disturbing my father; but, as usual, you only think of yourself."

"Please don't speak to her like that, Cardie," pleaded Olive. "She is not naughty; she has only woke up in a fright; she has been dreaming, I think."

"Dreaming!—I should think so, with that light full in her eyes, those sickening German books as usual," with a glance of disgust at the little round table, strewn with books and work, from which Olive had evidently that moment risen. "There, hush, Chrissy, like a good girl, and don't let us have any more of this noise."

"No, I can't. Oh, Cardie, I want mamma—I want mamma!" cried poor Chrissy, rolling on her pillow in childish abandonment of sorrow, but making heroic efforts to stifle her sobs. "Oh, mamma—mamma—mamma!"

"Hush!—lie silent. Do you think you are the only one who wants her?" returned Richard, sternly; but the hand that held the bedpost shook visibly, and he turned very pale as he spoke. "We must bear what we have to bear, Chrissy."

“ But I won’t bear it,” returned the spoilt child. “ I can’t bear it, Cardie; you are all so unkind to me. I want to kiss her, and put my arms round her, as I dreamt I was doing. I don’t love God for taking her away, when she didn’t want to go ; I know she didn’t.”

“ Oh, hush, Chriss—don’t be wicked ! ” gasped out Olive, with the tears in her eyes ; but, as though the child’s words had stung him beyond endurance, Richard turned on her angrily.

“ What is the good of reasoning with a child in this state ? can’t you find something better to say ? You are of no use at all, Olive. I don’t believe you feel the trouble as much as we do.”

“ Yes, she does. You must not speak so to your sister, Richard. Hush, my dear—hush ; ” and Mildred stooped with sorrowful motherly face over the pillow, where Chrissy, now really hysterical, was stuffing a portion of the sheet in her mouth to resist an almost frantic desire to scream. “ Go to my room, Olive, and you will find a little bottle of sal-volatile on my table. The child has been overtired. I noticed she looked pale at supper.” And as Olive brought it to her with shaking hand and pallid face, Mildred quietly measured the drops, and, beckoning to Richard to assist her, adminis-

tered the stimulating draught to the exhausted child. Chrissy tried to push it away, but Mildred's firm, "You must drink it, my dear," overcame her resistance, though her painful choking made swallowing difficult.

"Now we will try some nice fresh water to this hot face and these feverish hands," continued Mildred, in a brisk, cheerful tone; and Chrissy ceased her miserable sobbing in astonishment at the novel treatment. Every one but Dr. Heriot had scolded her for these fits, and in consequence she had used an unwholesome degree of restraint for a child: an unusually severe breakdown had been the result.

"Give me a brush, Olive, to get rid of some of this tangle. I think we look a little more comfortable now, Richard. Let me turn your pillow, dear —there, now;" and Mildred tenderly rested the child's heavy head against her shoulder, stroking the rough yellowish mane very softly. Chrissy's sobs were perceptibly lessening now, though she still gasped out "mamma" at intervals.

"She is better now," whispered Mildred, who saw Richard still near them. "Had you not better go downstairs, or your father will wonder?"

"Yes, I will go," he returned; yet he still

lingered, as though some visitings of compunction for his hardness troubled him. "Good night, Chrissy ;" but Chrissy, whose cheek rested comfortably against her aunt's shoulder, took no notice. Possibly want of sympathy had estranged the little sore heart.

"Kiss your brother, my dear, and bid him good-night. All this has given him pain." And as Chrissy still hesitated, Richard, with more feeling than he had hitherto shown, bent over them, and kissed them both, and then paused by the little round table.

"I am very sorry I said that, Livy."

"There was no harm in saying it, if you thought it, Cardie. I am only grieved at that."

"I ought not to have said it, all the same ; but it is enough to drive one frantic to see how different everything is." Then, in a whisper, and looking at Mildred, "Aunt Milly has given us all a lesson ; me, as well as you. You must try to be like her, Livy."

"I will try ;" but the tone was hopeless.

"You must begin by plucking up a little spirit, then. Well, good night."

"Good night, Cardie," was the listless answer, as she suffered him to kiss her cheek. "It was

only Olive's ordinary want of demonstration," Richard thought, as he turned away, a little relieved by his voluntary confession; "only one of her cold, tiresome ways."

Only one of her ways!

Long after Chrissy had fallen into a refreshing sleep, and Mildred had crept softly away to sleepy, wondering Polly, Olive sat at the little round table with her face buried in her arms, both hid in the loosely-dropping hair.

"I could have borne him to have said anything else but this," she moaned. "Not feel as they do, not miss her as much, my dear, beautiful mother, who never scolded me, who believed in me always, even when I disappointed her most;—oh, Cardie, Cardie, how could you have found it in your heart to say that!"

CHAPTER VI.

CAIN AND ABEL.

“There was a little stubborn dame
Whom no authority could tame ;
Restive by long indulgence grown,
No will she minded but her own.”

Wilkie.

CHRISSEY was sufficiently unwell the next day to make her aunt's petting a wholesome remedy. In moments of languor and depression even a whimsical and erratic nature will submit to a winning power of gentleness, and Chriss's flighty little soul was no exception to the rule: the petting, being a novelty, pleased and amused her, while it evidently astonished the others. Olive was too timid and awkward, and Richard too quietly matter-of-fact, to deal largely in caresses, while Roy's demonstrations somehow never included Contradiction Chriss.

Chriss unfortunately belonged to the awkward squad, whose manœuvres were generally held to interfere with every one else. People gave her a

wide berth ; she trod on their moral corns and offended their tenderest prejudices ; she was growing up thin-lipped and sharp-tongued, and there was a spice of venom in her words that was not altogether childlike.

“ My poor little girl,” thought Mildred, as she sat beside her working ; “ it is very evident that the weeds are growing up fast for lack of attention. Some flowers will only grow in the sunshine ; no child’s nature, however sweet, will thrive in an atmosphere of misunderstanding and constant fault-finding.”

Chrissy liked lying in that cool room, arranging Aunt Milly’s work-box, or watching her long white fingers as they moved so swiftly. Without wearying the over-tasked child, Mildred kept up a strain of pleasant conversation that stimulated curiosity and raised interest. She had even leisure and self-denial enough to lay aside a half-crossed darn to read a story when Chriss’s nerves seemed jarring into fretfulness again, and was rather pleased than otherwise when, at a critical moment, long-drawn breaths warned her that she had fallen into a sound sleep.

Mildred sat and pondered over a hundred new plans, while tired Chriss lay with the sweet air

blowing on her and the bees humming underneath the window. Now and then she stole a glance at the little figure, recumbent under the heartsease quilt. "She would be almost pretty if those sharp lines were softened and that tawny tangle of hair arranged properly; she has nice long eyelashes and a tolerably fair skin, though it would be the better for soap and water," thought motherly Mildred, with the laudable anxiety of one determined to make the best of everything, though a secret feeling still troubled her that Chrissy would be the least attractive to her of the four.

Chrissy's sleep lengthened into hours; that kindly foster-nurse Nature often taking restorative remedies of forcible narcotics into her own hands. She woke hungry and talkative, and after partaking of the tempting meal her aunt had provided, submitted with tolerable docility when Mildred announced her intention of making war with the tangles.

"It hurts dreadfully. I often wish I were bald —don't you, Aunt Milly?" asked Chrissy, wincing in spite of her bravery.

"In that case you will not mind if I thin some of this shagginess," laughed Mildred, at the same time arming herself with a formidable pair of

shears. "I wonder you are not afraid of Absalom's fate when you go bird-nesting."

"I wish you would cut it all off, like Polly's," pleaded Chriss, her eyes sparkling at the notion. "It makes my head so hot, and it is such a trouble. It would be worth anything to see Cardie's face when I go downstairs, looking like a clipped sheep; he would not speak to me for a week. Do please, Aunt Milly."

"My dear, do you think that such a desirable result?"

"What, making Cardie angry? I like to do it of all things. He never gets into a rage like Roy—when you have worked him up properly—but his mouth closes as though his lips were iron, as though it would never open again; and when he does speak, which is not for a very long time, his words seem to clip as sharp as your scissors—'Christine, I am ashamed of you!'"

"Those were the very words I wanted to use myself."

"What now?" and Chrissy screwed herself round in astonishment to look in her aunt's grave face. "I am quite serious I assure you, Aunt Milly. I sha'n't mind if I look like a singed pony, or a convict; Rex is sure to call me both. Shall I

fetch a pudding-basin and have it done—as Mrs. Stokes always does little Jem's?"

"Hush, Chrissy; this is pure childish nonsense. There! I've trimmed the refractory locks: you look a tidy little girl now. You have really very pretty hair, if you would only keep it in order," continued Mildred, trying artfully to rouse a spark of womanly vanity; but Chriss only pouted.

"I would rather be like the singed pony."

"Silly child!"

"Rex was in quite a temper when Polly said she hoped hers would never grow again. You have spoiled such a capital piece of revenge, Aunt Milly; I have almost a mind to do it myself." But Chriss's mischief-loving nature—always a dangerous one—was quelled for the moment by the look of quiet contempt with which Mildred took the scissors from her hand.

"I did not expect to find you such a baby at thirteen, Chriss."

Chriss blazed up in a moment, with a great deal of spluttering and incoherence. "Baby! I a baby! No one shall call me that again!" tossing her head and elevating her chin in childlike disdain.

"Quite right; I am glad you have formed such a wise determination, it would have been babyish,

Chriss," wilfully misunderstanding her. "None but very wicked and spiteful babies would ever scheme to put another in a rage. Do you know," continued Mildred cheerfully, as she took up her work, apparently regardless that Chrissy was eying her with the same withering wrath, "I always had a notion that Cain must have tried to put Abel in a passion, and failed, before he killed him!"

Chrissy recoiled a little.

"Perhaps he wanted him to fight, as men and boys do now, you know, only Abel's exceeding gentleness could not degenerate into such strife. To me there is something diabolical in the idea of trying to make any one angry. Certainly the weapons with which we do it are forged for us, red-hot, and put into our hands by the Evil-one himself."

"Aunt Milly!" Chrissy's head was quiescent now, and her chin in its normal position: the transition from anger to solemnity bewildered her. Mildred went on in the same quiet tone.

"You cannot love Cardie very much, when you are trying to make him angry, can you, Chrissy?"

"No—o—at least, I suppose not," stammered Chriss, who had no want of truth among her other faults.

“ Well; what is the opposite of loving ? ”

“ Hating. Oh, Aunt Milly, you can’t think so badly of me as that ! I don’t hate Cardie.”

“ God forbid, my child ! You know what the Bible says—‘ He who hateth his brother is a murderer.’ But, Chrissy, does it ever strike you that Cain could not always have been quite bad ? He had a child-heart too.”

“ I never thought of him but as quite grown up,” returned Chriss, with a touch of stubbornness, arising from an uneasy and awakened conscience. “ How fond you are of Cain, Aunt Milly.”

“ He is my example, my warning beacon, you see. He was the first-begotten of Envy, that eldest-born of Hell—a terrible incarnation of unresisted human passion. Had he first learned to restrain the beginnings of evil it would not have overwhelmed him so completely. Possibly in their young, hard-working life he would have loved to be able to make Abel angry.”

“ Aunt Milly ! ” Chrissy was shedding a few indignant tears now.

“ Well, my dear ? ”

“ It is too bad. You have no right to compare me with Cain,” sobbing vengefully.

“Did I do so ?” Nay, Chriss, I think you are mistaken.”

“First to be called a baby, and then a murderer !”

“Hush ! hush !”

“I know I am wicked to try and make them angry, but they tease me so ; they call me Contradiction, and the Barker, and Pugilist Pug, and lots of horrid names, and it was only like playing at war to get one’s revenge.”

“Choose some fairer play, my little Chriss.”

“It is such miserable work trying to be proper and good ; I don’t think I’ve got the face for it either,” went on Chriss, a subtle spirit of fun drying up her tears again, as she examined her features curiously in Mildred’s glass. “I don’t look as though I could be made good, do I, Aunt Milly” —frowning fiercely at herself—“not like a young Christian ?”

“More like a long-haired kitten,” returned Mildred, quaintly.

The epithet charmed Chriss into instant good-humour ; for a moment she looked half inclined to hug Mildred, but the effort was too great for her shyness, so she contented herself with a look of appreciation. “You can say funny things then—

how nice ! I thought you were so dreadfully solemn—worse than Cardie. Cardie could not say a funny thing to save his life, except when he is angry, and then, oh ! he is droll," finished incorrigible Chriss, as she followed her aunt downstairs, skipping three steps at a time.

Richard met them in the hall, and eyed the pseudo-invalid a little dubiously.

" So you are better, eh, Chriss ? That's right. I thought there was not much that ailed you after all," in a tone rather amiable than unfeeling.

" Not much to you, you mean. Perhaps you don't mind having a log in your head," began Chrissy, indignantly, but seeing visionary Cains in her aunt's glance, she checked herself. " If I am better it is all thanks to Aunt Milly's nursing, but she spoilt everything at the last."

" Why ?" asked Richard, curiously, detecting a lurking smile at the corner of Mildred's mouth.

" Why, I had concocted a nice little plan for riling you—putting you in a towering passion, you know—by coming down looking like a singed pony, or like Polly, in fact ; but she would not let me, took the scissors away, like the good aunt in a story-book."

" What nonsense is she talking, Aunt Milly ?

She looks very nice, though quite different to Chrissy somehow."

"We have only shorn a little of the superabundant fleece," returned Mildred, wondering why she felt so anxious for Richard's approval, and laughing at herself for being so.

"But I wanted it to be clipped just so, half an inch long, like Jemmy Stokes, and offered to fetch Nan's best pudding-basin for the purpose; but Aunt Milly would not hear of it. She said such dreadful things, Cardie!" And as Richard looked at her, with puzzled benevolence in his eyes, she raised herself on tiptoe and whispered into his ear, "She said—at least she almost implied, but it is all the same, Cardie—that if I did I should go on from bad to worse, and should probably end by murdering you, as Cain did Abel."

The following day was Sunday, and Mildred, who for her own reasons had not yet actively assumed the reins of government, had full leisure and opportunity for studying the family ways at the vicarage. In one sense it was certainly not a day of rest, for with the exception of Roy and Chrissy, the young people seemed more fully engrossed than on any other day.

Richard and Olive were both at the early service,

and Mildred, who, as usual, waited for her brother in the porch, was distressed to find Olive still with her hat on, snatching a few mouthfuls of food at the breakfast-table while she sorted a packet of reward cards.

“ My dear Olive, this is very wrong ; you must sit down and make a proper meal before going to the Sunday school.”

“ Indeed I have not a moment,” returned Olive, hurriedly, without looking up. “ My class will be waiting for me. I have to go down to old Mrs. Stevens about her grandchildren. I had no time last night. Richard always makes the breakfast on Sunday morning.”

“ Yes,” returned Richard, in his most repressive tone, as he poured out a cup of coffee and carried it round to Olive, and then cut her another piece of bread and butter. “ I believe Livy would like to dispense with her meals altogether or take them standing. I tell her she is comfortless by nature. She would go without breakfast often if I did not make a fuss about it. There you must stay till you have eaten that.” But Mildred noticed, though his voice was decidedly cross, he had cut the bread *à la tartine* for his sister’s greater convenience.

Morning service was followed by the early

dinner. Mr. Lambert, who was without a curate, the last having left him from ill-health, was obliged to accept such temporary assistance as he could procure from the neighbouring parishes. To-day Mr. Heath, of Brough, had volunteered his services, and accompanied the party back to the vicarage. Mildred, who had hoped to hear her brother preach, was somewhat disappointed. She thought Mr. Heath and his sermon very commonplace and uninteresting. Ideas seemed wanting in both. The conversation during dinner turned wholly on parish matters, and the heinous misdemeanours of two or three ratepayers who had made a commotion at the last vestry meeting. The only sentence that seemed worthy of attention was at the close of the meal, just as the bell was ringing for the public catechising.

“Where is Heriot? I have not set eyes on him yet!”

Richard, who was just following Olive out of the room, paused with his hand on the door to answer.

“He has come back from Penrith. I met him by the Brewery after Church, coming over from Hartly. He promised if he had time to look in after service as usual.”

Polly's eyes sparkled, and she almost danced up to Richard. "Heriot! Is that my Dr. Heriot—my guardian?" with a decided stress on the possessive pronoun.

"Oh, that's Heriot's ward, is it, Lambert? Humph, rather a queer affair, isn't it, leaving that child to him? Heriot's a comparatively young man, hardly five-and-thirty I should say," and Mr. Heath's rosy face grew preternaturally solemn.

"Polly is our *protégée* now," returned Mr. Lambert, with one of his kind, sad smiles, stretching out a hand to the girl. "Mildred has promised to look after her; and she will be Olive's and Chrissy's companion. You are one of my little girls now, are you not, Polly?" Polly shook her head, her face had lengthened a little over Mr. Lambert's words.

"I like you, of course, and I like to be here. Aunt Milly is so nice, and so is Roy; but I can only belong to my guardian."

"Hoity-toity, there will be some trouble here, Lambert. You must put Heriot on his guard," and Mr. Heath burst out laughing; Polly regarding him the while with an air of offended dignity.

"Did I say anything to make him laugh? there is nothing laughable in speaking the truth.

Papa gave me to my guardian, and of course that means I belong to him."

"Never mind, Polly, let Mr. Heath laugh if he likes. We know how to value such a faithful little friend—do we not, Mildred?"—and patting her head gently, he bade her fetch him a book he had left on his study table, and to Mildred's relief the conversation dropped, and Mr. Heath shortly afterwards took his departure.

Later on in the afternoon Mildred set out for a quiet walk to the cemetery. Polly and Chriss were sunning themselves on the terrace, while Roy was stretched in sleepy enjoyment on the grass at their feet, with his straw hat pulled over his face. Richard had walked up to Kirkleatham on business for his father. No one knew exactly what had become of Olive.

"She will turn up at tea-time, she always does," suggested Roy, in a tone of dreamy indifference. "Go on, Polly, you have a sweet little voice for reading as well as singing. We are doing Milton, Aunt Milly, only Polly sometimes stops to spell the long words, which somehow breaks the Miltonic wave of harmony. Can't you fancy I am Adam, and you are Eve, Polly, and this is a little bit of Paradise—just that delicious

dip of green, with the trees and the water ; and the milky mother of the herd coming down to the river to drink ; and the rich golden streak of light behind Mallerstang ? If it were not Sunday now," and Roy's fingers grasped an imaginary brush.

"Roy and Polly seem to live in a Paradise of their own," thought Mildred, as she passed through the quiet streets. "They have only known each other for two days, and yet they are always together and share a community of interest — they are both such bright, clever, lovable creatures. I wonder where Olive is, and whether she ever knows what a real idle hour of *dolce far niente* means. That girl must be taught positively how to enjoy ;" and Mildred pushed the heavy swinging cemetery gates with a sigh, as she thought how joyless and weary seemed Olive's life compared to that of the bright happy creature they had laid there. Betha's nature was of the hearts-ease type ; it seemed strange that the mother had transmitted none of her sweet sunshiny happiness to her young daughter ; but here Mildred paused in her wonderings with a sudden start. She was not alone as she supposed. She had reached a shady corner behind the chapel, where there was a little plot of grass and an acacia tree ; and against

the marble cross under which Betha Lambert's name was written there sat, or rather leant—for the attitude was forlorn even in its restfulness—a drooping, black figure easily recognised as Olive.

"This is where she comes on Sunday afternoons ; she keeps it a secret from the others ; none of them have discovered it," thought Mildred, grieved at having disturbed the girl's sacred privacy, and she was quietly retracing her steps, when Olive suddenly raised her head from the book she was reading. As their eyes met, there was a start and a sudden rush of sensitive colour to the girl's face.

"I did not know ; I am so sorry to disturb you, my love," began Mildred, apologetically.

"It does not disturb me—at least, not much," was the truthful answer. "I don't like the others to know I come here—because—oh, I have reasons—but this is your first visit, Aunt Milly," divining Mildred's sympathy by some unerring instinct.

"Yes—may I stay for a moment? thank you, my dear," as Olive willingly made room for her. "How beautiful and simple; just the words she loved," and Mildred read the inscription and chosen text—"His banner over me is love."

“Do you like it? Mamma chose it herself; she said it was so true of her life.”

“Happy Betha!” and in a lower voice, “Happy Olive!”

“Why, Aunt Milly?”

“To have had such a mother, though it be only to lose her. Think of the dear bright smiles with which she will welcome you all home.”

Olive’s eyes glistened, but she made no answer. Mildred was struck with the quiet repose of her manner; the anxious careworn look had disappeared for the time, and the soft intelligence of her face bore the stamp of some lofty thought.

“Do you always come here, Olive? At this time I mean.”

“Yes, always—I have never missed once; it seems to rest me for the week. Just at first, perhaps, it made me sad, but now it is different.”

“How do you mean, my dear?”

“I don’t know that I can put it exactly in words,” she returned, troubled by a want of definite expression. “At first it used to make me cry, and wish I were dead, but now I never feel so like living as when I am here.”

“Try to make me understand. I don’t think

you will find me unsympathising," in Mildred's tenderest tones.

" You are never that, Aunt Milly. I find myself telling you things already. Don't you see, I can come and pour out all my trouble to her, just as I used to? and sometimes I fancy she answers me, not in speaking, you know, but in the thoughts that come as I sit here."

" That is a beautiful fancy, Olive."

" Others might laugh at it—Cardie would, I know, but it is impossible to believe mamma can help loving us wherever she is; and she always liked us to come and tell her everything, when we were naughty, or if we had anything nice happening to us."

" Yes, dear, I quite understand. But you were reading."

" That was mamma's favourite book. I generally read a few pages before I go. One seems to understand it all so much better in this quiet place, with the sun shining, and all those graves round. One's little troubles seem so small and paltry by comparison."

Mildred did not answer. She took the book out of Olive's hand—it was *Thomas à Kempis*—and a red pencil line had marked the following passage:—

“Thou shalt not long toil here, nor always be oppressed with griefs.

“Wait a little while, and thou shalt see a speedy end of thy evils.

“There will come a time when all labour and trouble shall cease.

“Poor and brief is all that passeth away with time.

“Do [in earnest] what thou doest ; labour faithfully in My vineyard : I will be thy recompense.

“Write, read, chant, mourn, keep silence, pray, endure crosses manfully ; life everlasting is worth all these conflicts, and greater than these.

“Peace shall come in one day, which is known unto the Lord ; and it shall not be day nor night (that is at this present time), but unceasing light, infinite brightness, stedfast peace, and secure rest.”

“Don’t you like it ?” whispered Olive, timidly ; but Mildred still made no answer. How she had wronged this girl ! Under the ungainly form lay this beautiful soul-coinage, fresh from God’s mint, with His stamp of innocence and divinity fresh on it, to be marred by a world’s use or abuse.

Mildred’s clear instinct had already detected unusual intelligence under the clumsiness and awkward ways that were provocative of perpetual censure in the family circle. The timidity that seemed to others a cloak for mere coldness had not deceived her. But she was not prepared for this faith that defied dead matter, and clung about the

spirit footsteps of the mother, bearing in the silence—that baffling silence to smaller natures—the faint perceptive whispers of deathless love.

“Olive, you have made me ashamed of my own doubts,” she said at last, taking the girl’s hand and looking on the unlovely face with feelings akin to reverence. “I see now, as I never have done before, how a thorough understanding robs even death of its terror—how ‘perfect love casteth out fear.’”

“If one could always feel as one does now,” sighed Olive, raising her dark eyes with a new yearning in them. “But the rest and the strength seem to last for such a little time. Last Sunday,” she continued, sadly, “I felt almost happy sitting here. Life seemed somehow sweet, after all, but before evening I was utterly wretched.”

“By your own fault, or by that of others?”

“My own, of course. If I were not so provoking in my ways—Cardie, I mean—the others would not be so hard on me. Thinking makes one absent, and then mistakes happen.”

“Yes, I see.” Mildred did not say more. She felt the time was not come for dealing with the strange idiosyncrasies of a peculiar and difficult character. She was ignorant as yet what special gifts or graces of imagination lay under the com-

prehensive term of “bookishness,” which had led her to fear in Olive the typical bluestocking. But she was not wrong in the supposition that Olive’s very goodness bordered on faultiness ; over-conscientiousness, and morbid scrupulosity, producing a sort of mental fatigue in the onlooker—restfulness being always more highly prized by us poor mortals than any amount of struggling and perceptible virtue.

Mildred was a true diplomatist by nature ; most womanly women are. It was from no want of sympathy, but an exercise of real judgment, that she now quietly concluded the conversation, by the suggestion that they should go home.

Mildred had the satisfaction of hearing her brother preach that evening, and, though some of the old fire and vigour were wanting, and there were at times the languid utterances of failing strength, still it was evident that, for the moment, sorrow was forgotten in the deep earnestness of one who feels the immensity of the task before him—the awful responsibility of the cure of souls.

The text was, “Why halt ye between two opinions ?” and afforded a rich scope for persuasive argument ; and Mildred’s attention never wavered but once, when her eyes rested for a moment acci-

dentially on Richard. He and Roy, with some other younger members of the congregation, occupied the choir-stalls, or rather the seats appropriated for the purpose, the real choir-stalls being occupied by some of the neighbouring farmers and their families —an abuse that Mr. Lambert had not yet been able to rectify.

Roy's sleepy blue eyes were half closed ; but Richard's forehead was deeply furrowed with the lines of intense thought, a heavy frown settled over the brows, and the mouth was rigid ; the immobility of feature and fixed contraction of the pupils bespeaking some violent struggle within.

The sunset clouds were just waning into pallor and blue-grey indistinctness, with a lightning-like breadth of gold on the outermost edges, when Mildred stepped out from the dark porch, with Polly hanging on her arm.

“Is that Jupiter or Venus, Aunt Milly ?” she asked, pointing to the sky above them. “It looks large and grand enough for Jupiter ; and oh, how sweet the wet grass smells !”

“You are right, my little astronomer,” said a voice close behind them. “There is the king of planets in all his majesty. Miss Lambert, I hope you recognise an old acquaintance as well as a new

friend. Ah, Polly! Faithful, though a woman! I see you have not forgotten me." And Dr. Heriot laughed a low amused laugh at feeling his disengaged hand grasped by Polly's soft little fingers.

The laugh nettled her.

"No, I have not forgotten, though other people have, it seems," she returned, with a little dignity, and dropping his hand. "Three whole days, and you have never been to see us or bid us welcome! Do you wonder Aunt Milly and I are offended?"

Mildred coloured, but she had too much good sense to disclaim a share in Polly's childish reproaches.

"I will make my apology to Miss Lambert when she feels it is needed; at present she might rather look upon it in the light of a liberty," observed Dr. Heriot, coolly. "Country practitioners are not very punctual in paying mere visits of ceremony. I hope you have recovered from the fatigues of settling down in a new place, Miss Lambert?"

Mildred smiled. "It is a very bearable sort of fatigue. Polly and I begin to look upon ourselves as old inhabitants. Novelty and strangeness soon wear off."

"And you are happy, Polly?"—repossessing

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— I just had I am not running
to set up — I like the young
and I am — almost is him

This is the second a William took, that some
of us called "Liberator" but now known as Mr.
and Mrs. E. L. Johnson and Miss F. I. Since my
return to the States he is exclusive in her

He is a good boy and so and
so and so with a solemn shake of her head
she says "No" to him. He makes me ache all
over and she's special. She has not a bit of
the old boy in her. She has got a stamp like the old
woman's stamp is a stamp.

"Some use would be the better for some of
these waters, I think," observed her guardian,
answering. "You must take care of this little piece
of originality, Miss Lamberti; it has a trifle too
much leaveness. The pungent grains of titillating
pepper as Puce has it, perceptible in your discourse,
only have a certain sharpness of flavour. So
and some Dick is under the lash, eh?"

Polly held her peace.

“Come, I am curious to hear your opinion of Mentor the younger, as Rex calls him.”

“‘Sternly he pronounced the rigid interdiction’ *vide* Milton. Don’t go away, Dick; it will be wholesome discipline on the score of listeners hearing no good of themselves.”

“What, are you behind us, lads? Polly’s discernment was not at fault, then.”

“It was not that,” she returned, indifferently. “Richard knows I think him cross and disagreeable. He and Chrissy put me in mind sometimes of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

The rest laughed; but her guardian ejaculated, half-seriously, “Defend me from such a Polly!”

“Well, am I not right?” she continued, pouting. “Chrissy never believes anything, and Richard is always measuring out rules for himself and other people. You know you are tiresome sometimes,” she continued, facing round on Richard, to the great amusement of the others; but the rigid face hardly relaxed into a smile. He was in no mood for amusement to-night.

“Come, I won’t have fault found with our young Mentor. I am afraid my ward is a little contumacious, Miss Lambert,” turning to her, as she stood with the little group outside the vicarage.

"I don't understand your long words ; but I see you are all laughing at me," returned Polly, in a tone of such pique that Dr. Heriot very wisely changed the conversation.

CHAPTER VII.

A MOTHER IN ISRAEL.

“Of marvellous gentleness she was unto all folk, but specially unto her own, whom she trusted and loved right tenderly. Unkind she would not be unto no creature, nor forgetful of any kindness or service done to her before, which is no little part of nobleness. . . . Merciful also and piteous she was unto such as was grieved and troubled, and to them that were in poverty or sickness, or any other trouble.” — *Fisher, Bishop of Rochester.*

MILDRED was not slow in perceiving that Dr. Heriot had imported a new element of cheerfulness into the family circle; they were all seated cosily round the supper-table when she came downstairs. Olive, who had probably received some hint to that effect, had placed herself between her father and Richard.

Mildred looked at the vacant place at the head of the table a little dubiously.

“Never hesitate in claiming abrogated authority,” observed Dr. Heriot, gravely, as he placed the chair for her.

Mildred gave him a puzzled glance: “Does my brother—does Olive wish it?”

“Can you doubt it?” he returned, reproachfully. “Have you not found out how wearily those young shoulders bear the weight of any responsibility!” with a pitying glance in Olive’s direction, which seemed hardly needed, for she looked brighter than usual. “Give them time to gain strength, and she will thank you for the mercy shown her. To-night she will eat her supper with some degree of enjoyment, now this joint is off her mind,” and, quietly appropriating the carving-knife, he was soon engaged in satisfying the young and healthy appetites round him; while answering at the same time the numerous questions Roy and Chrissy were pleased to put to him.

Dr. Heriot, or Dr. John, as they called him, seemed the family referee. A great stress was laid on the three days’ absence, which it was averred had accumulated a mass of plans to be decided.

Richard wanted to consult him about the mare. Mr. Lambert had some lengthy document from the Bounty Office to show him. Chrissy begged for an invitation for herself and Polly for the following evening, and Olive pleaded to be allowed to come too, as she wanted to refer to some books in his library.

Polly looked from one to the other only half-

pleased with all this familiarity. "He might be every one's guardian," she remarked *sotto voce* to Roy; but Dr. Heriot soon found means to allay the childish jealousy, which he was quick enough to perceive.

Mildred thought he looked younger and happier to-night, with all those young aspirants for his notice pressing round him. She was startled to hear a soft laugh from Olive once, though it was checked immediately, as though duty put a force on inclination.

Mr. Lambert retired to his study after supper, and Olive, at Dr. Heriot's request, went to the piano. Mildred had heard she had no taste for music; but to her surprise she played some hymns with accuracy and feeling, the others joining in as they pleased. Richard pleaded fatigue and a headache, and sat in the farthest corner, looking over the dark fells, and shading his eyes from the lamplight; but Dr. Heriot sang in a rich, full voice, Polly sitting at his feet and sharing his hymn-book, while Chrissy looked over his shoulder. Mildred was enjoying the harmony, and wondering over Roy's beautiful tenor, when she was startled to see him turn suddenly very pale, and leave off singing; and a moment afterwards,

as though unable to contain himself, he abruptly left the room.

Olive glanced uneasily round, and then, under cover of the singing, whispered to Mildred—

“I forgot. Oh, how careless!—how wrong of me! Aunt Milly, will you please go after him?”

Mildred obeyed. She found him leaning against the open garden door—white, and almost gasping.

“My dear boy, you are ill. Shall I call Dr. Heriot to you?” but he shook his head impatiently.

“Nonsense—I am all right; at least, I shall be in a moment. Don’t stay, Aunt Milly. I would not have Cardie see me for worlds; he would be blaming Olive, and I know she forgot.”

“The hymn we were singing, do you mean?”

“Yes; she, mamma, was so fond of it. We used to have it every night in her room. She asked for it almost at the last. *Sun of my soul*; the hymn of hymns, she called it. It was just like Livy to forget. I can stand any but that one—it beats me. Ah, Aunt Milly!” his boyish tones suddenly breaking beyond control.

“Dear Rex, don’t mind; these feelings do you honour. I love you the better for them;” pressing the fair head tenderly to her shoulder, as she had

done Chrissy's. She was half afraid he might resent the action, but for the moment his manhood was helpless.

"That is just what she used to do," he said, with a half sob. "You remind me of her somehow, Aunt Milly. There's some one coming after us. Please—please let me go." The petulant dignity of seventeen years asserting itself again; but he seemed still so white and shaken, that she ventured to detain him.

"Roy, dear, it is only Olive. There is nothing of which to be ashamed."

"Livy, oh, I don't mind her. I thought it was Dick or Heriot. Livy, how could you play that thing when you know—you know—" but the rest of the speech was choked somehow.

"Oh, Rex, I am so sorry."

"Well, never mind; it can't be helped now. Only Aunt Milly has seen me make an ass of myself."

"You are too good to scold me, Rex, I know, but I am grieved—I am indeed. I am so fond of that hymn for her sake, that I always play it to myself; and I forgot you could not bear it," continued poor Olive, humbly.

"All right; you need not cover yourself with

dust and ashes," interrupted Roy, with a nervous laugh. "Ah, confound it, there's Richard! What a fellow he is for turning up at the wrong time. Good night, Livy," he continued, with a pretence at cheerfulness; "the dews are unwholesome. Pleasant dreams and sweet repose;" but Olive still lingered, regardless of Roy's good-humoured attempts to save an additional scolding.

"Well, what's all this about?" demanded Richard, abruptly.

"It is my fault, as usual, Cardie," returned Olive, courting her fate with clumsy bravery. "I upset him by playing that hymn. Of course I ought to have remembered."

"Culprit, plaintiff, defendant, and judge in one," groaned Roy. "Spare us the rest, Dick, and prove to our young minds that honesty is the best policy."

But Richard's brow grew dark. "This is the second time it has happened; it is too bad, Olive. Not content with harassing us from morning to night with your shiftless, unwomanly ways, you must make a blunder like this. One's most sacred feelings trampled on mercilessly,—it is unpardonable."

"Oh, draw it mild, Dick;" but Roy's lip still

quivered ; his sensitive nature had evidently received a shock.

“ You are too good-natured, Rex. Such cruel heedlessness deserves reproof, but it is all lost on Livy ; she will never understand how we feel about these things.”

“ Indeed, Cardie——” but Richard sternly checked her.

“ There is no use in saying anything more about it. If you are so devoid of tact and feeling, you can at least have the grace to be ashamed of yourself. Come, Roy, a turn in the air will do you good ; my head still aches badly. Let us go down over Hillsbottom for a stroll ;” and Richard laid his hand persuasively on Roy’s shoulder.

Roy shook off his depression with an effort. Mildred fancied his brother’s well-meant attempt at consolation jarred on him ; but he was of too easy a nature to contend against a stronger will ; he hesitated a moment, however.

“ We have not said good night to Livy.”

“ Be quick about it, then,” returned Richard, turning on his heel ; then remembering himself, “ Good night, Aunt Milly. I suppose we shall not see you on our return ?” but he took no

notice of Olive, though she mutely offered her cheek as he passed.

“ My dear, you will take cold, standing out here with uncovered head,” Mildred said, passing her arm gently through the girl’s to draw her to the house; but Olive shook her head, and remained rooted to the spot.

“ He never bade me good night,” she said at last, and then a large tear rolled slowly down her face.

“ Do you mean Richard? He is not himself to-night; something is troubling him, I am sure.” But Mildred felt a little indignation rising, as she thought of her nephew’s hardness.

“ Rex kissed me, though; and he was the one I hurt. Rex is never hard and unkind. Oh, Aunt Milly, I think Cardie begins to dislike me;” the tears falling faster over her pale cheeks.

“ My dear Olive, this is only one of your morbid fancies. It is wrong to say such things; wrong to Richard.”

“ Why should I not say what I think? There, do you see them”—pointing to a strip of moonlight beyond the bridge—“ he has his arm round Roy, and is talking to him gently. I know his way; he can be oh so gentle when he likes. He

is only hard to me ; he is kinder even to Chrissy, who teases him from morning to night ; and I do not deserve it, because I love him so ;” burying her face in her hands, and weeping convulsively, as no one had ever seen Olive weep before.

“Hush, dear—hush ; you are tired and overstrained with the long day’s work, or you would not fret so over an impatient word. Richard does not mean to be unkind, but he is domineering by nature, and——”

“No, Aunt Milly, not domineering,” striving to speak between her sobs ; “he thinks so little of himself, and so much of others. He is vexed about Roy’s being upset ; he is so fond of Roy.”

“Yes, but he has no right to misunderstand his sister so completely.”

“I don’t think I am the right sort of sister for him, Aunt Milly. Polly would suit him better ; she is so bright and lovable ; and then he cares so much about looks.”

“Nonsense, Olive ; men don’t think if their sisters have beauty or not. I mean it does not make any difference in their affection.”

“Ah, it does with Cardie. He thinks Chriss will be pretty, and so he takes more notice of her. He said once it was very hard for a man not to be

proud of his sisters ; he meant me, I know. He is always finding fault with my hair and my dress, and telling me no woman need be absolutely ugly unless she likes."

"I can see a gleam in the clouds now. We will please our young taskmaster before we have done."

Olive smiled faintly, but the tears still came. It was true : she was worn in body and mind. In this state tears are a needful luxury, as Mildred well knew.

"It is not this I mind. Of course one would be beautiful if one could ; but I should think it paltry to care," speaking with mingled simplicity and resignation.

"Mamma told us not to trouble about such things, as it would all be made up to us one day. What I really mind, is his thinking I do not share his and Roy's feelings about things."

"People have different modes of expressing them. You could play that hymn, you see."

"Yes, and love to do it. When Roy left the room I had forgotten everything. I thought mamma was singing it with us, and it seemed so beautiful."

"Richard would call that visionary."

"He would never know ;" her voice dropping

again into its hopeless key. "He thinks I am too cold to care much even about that ; he does indeed, Aunt Milly :" as Mildred, shocked and distressed, strove to hush her. "Not that I blame him, because Roy thinks the same. I never talk to any of them as I have done to you these two days."

"Then we have something tangible on which to lay the blame. You are too reserved with your brothers, Olive. You do not let them see how much you feel about things." She winced.

"No, I could not bear to be repulsed. I would rather—much rather—be thought cold, than laughed at for a visionary. Would not you, Aunt Milly ? It hurts less, I think."

"And you can hug yourself in the belief that no one has discovered the real Olive. You can shut yourself up in your citadel, while they batter at the outworks. My poor girl, why need you shroud yourself, as though your heart, a loving one, Olive, had some hidden deformity ? If Richard had my eyes, he would think differently."

Olive shook her head.

"My child, you deprecate yourself too much. We have no right to look down on any piece of God's handiwork. Separate yourself from your faults. Your poor soul suffers for want of cherish-

ing. It does not deserve such harsh treatment. Why not respect yourself as one whom God intends to make like unto the angels ? ”

“Aunt Milly, no one has said such things to me before.”

“ Well, dear ! ”

“ It is beautiful—the idea, I mean—it seems to heal the sore place.”

“ I meant it to do so. It is not more beautiful than the filial love that can find rest by a mother’s grave. Cardie would never think of doing that. When his paroxysms of pain come on him, he vents himself in long solitary walks, or shuts himself up in his room.”

“ Aunt Milly, how did you know that ? who told you ? ”

“ My own intuition,” returned Mildred, smiling. “ Come, child, it is long past ten. I wonder what Polly and Dr. Heriot have been doing with themselves all this time. Go to sleep and forget all about these troubles ; ” and Mildred kissed the tear-stained face tenderly as she spoke.

She found Dr. Heriot alone when she entered the drawing-room. He looked up at her rather strangely, she thought. Could he have overheard any of their conversation ?

“I was just coming out to warn you of imprudence,” he said, rising and offering her his chair. “Sit there and rest yourself a little. Do mothers in Israel generally have such tired faces?” regarding her with a grave, inscrutable smile.

He had heard then. Mildred could not help the rising colour that testified to her annoyance.

“Forgive me,” he returned, leaning over the back of her chair, and speaking with the utmost gentleness. “I did not mean to annoy you, far from it. Your voices just underneath the window reached me occasionally, and I only heard enough to——”

“Well, Dr. Heriot?”

Mildred sat absolutely on thorns.

“To justify the name I just called you. I cannot help it, Miss Lambert, you so thoroughly deserve it.”

Mildred grew scarlet.

“You ought to have given us a hint. Olive had no idea, neither had I. I thought—we thought, you were talking to the girls.”

“So I was; but I sent them away long ago. My dear Miss Lambert, I believe you are accusing me in your heart of listening,” elevating his eyebrows slightly, as though the idea was absurd.

"Pray dismiss such a notion from your mind. I was in a brown study, and thinking of my favourite Richard, when poor Olive's sobs roused me."

"Richard your favourite!"

"Yes, is he not yours?" with an inquisitive glance. "All Dick's faults, glaring as they are, could not hide his real excellence from such observing eyes."

"He interests me," she returned, reluctantly; "but they all do that of course." Somehow she was loth to confess to a secret predilection in Richard's favour. "He does not deserve me to speak well of him to-night," she continued, with her usual candour.

Dr. Heriot looked surprised.

"He has been captious and sharp with Olive again, then, I suppose. I love to see a woman side with her sex. Well, do you know, if I were Richard, Olive would provoke me."

"Possibly," was Mildred's cool reply, for the remembrance of the last tear-stained face made any criticism on Olive peculiarly unpalatable at that moment.

Dr. Heriot was quick to read the feeling.

"Don't be afraid, Miss Lambert. I don't mean to say a word against your adopted daughter, only

to express my thankfulness that she has fallen into such tender hands," and for a moment he looked at the slim, finely-shaped hands lying folded in Mildred's lap, and which were her chief beauty. "I only want you to be lenient in your judgment of Richard, for in his present state she tries him sorely."

"One can see he is very unhappy."

"People are who create a Doubting Castle for themselves, and carry Giant Despair, as a sort of old man of the mountains, on their shoulders," he returned, drily. "'The perfect woman nobly planned' is rather an inconvenient sort of burthen too. Well, it is growing late, and I must go and look after those boys."

"Wait a minute, Dr. Heriot. You know his trouble, perhaps?"

He nodded.

"Troubles, you mean. They are threefold, at least, poor Cardie! Very few youths of nineteen know how to arrange their life, or to like other people to arrange it for them."

"I want to ask you something; you know them all so well. Do you think I shall ever win his confidence?"

"You," looking at her kindly; "no one deserves

it more, of course; but——” pausing in some perplexity.

“ You hesitate.”

“ Well, Cardie is peculiar. His mother was his sole confidant, and, when he lost her, I verily believe the poor fellow was as near heart-break as possible. I have got into his good graces lately, and now and then he lets off the steam; but not often. He is a great deal up at Kirkleatham House; but I doubt the wisdom of an adviser so young and fair as Miss Trelawny.”

“ Miss Trelawny! Who is she?”

“ What, have you not heard of ‘ Ethel the Magnificent’? The neighbourhood reports that Richard and I have both lost our hearts to her, and are rivals. Only believe half you hear in Kirkby Stephen, Miss Lambert.”

“ But Richard is only nineteen.”

“ True; and I was accused of wearing her hair in a locket at my watch-guard. Miss Trelawny’s hair is light brown, and this is bright auburn. I don’t trouble myself to inform people that I may possibly be wearing my mother’s hair.”

“ Then you don’t think my task will be easy?” asked Mildred, ignoring the bitterness with which he had spoken.

“What task—that of winning Cardie’s confidence? I hope you don’t mean to be an anxious nother, and grow grey before your time.” Then, as though touched by Mildred’s yearning look, ‘I wish I could promise you would have no difficulty; but facts are stubborn things. Richard is close and somewhat impracticable; but as you seem an adept in winning, you may soften down his ruggedness sooner than we expect. Come, is that vaguely encouraging?’

One of Mildred’s quaint smiles flitted over her face as she answered—

“Not very; but I mean to try, however. If I am to succeed I must give Miss Trelawny a wide berth.”

“Why so?” looking at her in surprise.

“If your hint be true, Richard’s manliness would never brook feminine interference.”

Dr. Heriot laughed.

“I was hardly prepared for such feminine sagacity. You are a wise woman, Miss Lambert. If you go on like this, we shall all be afraid of you. The specimen is rare enough in these parts I assure you. Well, good night.”

It was with mingled feelings that Mildred retired to rest that night. The events of the day, with its

jarring interests and disturbed harmony, had given her deep insight into the young lives around her.

Three days!—she felt as though she had been three months among them. She was thankful that Olive's confidence seemed already won—thankful and touched to the heart; and though her conversation with Dr. Heriot had a little damped her with regard to Richard, hers was the sort of courage that gains strength with obstacles; and, before she slept that night, the fond prayer rose to her lips, that Betha's sons might find a friend in her.

She woke the next morning with a consciousness that duty lay ready to hand, opening out before her as the dawn brightened into day. On her way downstairs she came upon Olive, looking heavy-eyed and unrefreshed, as though from scant sleep. She was hunting among her father's papers for a book she had mislaid.

“Have you seen it, Aunt Milly?”

“Do you mean this?” holding out a dilapidated *Wilhelm Tell* for her inspection. “I picked it up in the court, and placed it on the shelf for safety. Wait a moment, dear,” as Olive was rushing away, “I want to speak to you. Was it by yours or your father's wish that you gave up your seat at supper to me?”

"Oh, it was Dr. John—at least—I mean I would much rather you always had it, Aunt Milly," returned Olive, in her usual incoherent fashion. "Please, do take it; it was such a load off my mind to see you sitting there."

"But, my dear," remonstrated Mildred; but Olive interrupted her with unusual eagerness.

"Oh, you must; you look so much nicer; and I hate it so. Dr. John arranged it all, and papa said 'Yes,' as he always does. He put it so kindly, that one could not mind; he told papa that with my disposition—timidity he meant, and absence of mind—it would be better for everybody's comfort if you assumed the entire management of everything at once; and that it would be better for me to learn from you for a few years, until you had made me a capable woman. Cardie heard him, I know; for he gave quite a sigh of relief."

"Perhaps they are right; but it seems strange for Dr. Heriot to interfere in such a matter," returned Mildred, in a puzzled tone.

"Oh, Dr. John always settles things; nobody calls it interference from him," explained Olive, in her simple matter-of-fact way. "It is such a relief to be told what to do. Papa only thanked him, and begged me to put myself entirely under your

direction. You are to have the keys, and I am to show you the store cupboards and places, and to introduce you to Nan. We are afraid you will find her a little troublesome at first, Aunt Milly ;" but Mildred only smiled, and assured her she was not afraid of Nan, and as the bells were ringing the brief colloquy ceased.

Mildred was quite aware Dr. Heriot was in church, as his fine voice was distinctly audible, leading the responses. To her surprise he joined them after service, and without waiting for an invitation, announced his intention of breakfasting with them.

" Nan's rolls are especially tempting on Monday morning," he observed, coolly ; " but to-day that is not my inducement. Is teaching one's ward the catechism included in the category of a guardian's duty, Miss Lambert ? "

" I was not aware that such was the case," returned Mildred, laughing. " Do you mean to teach Polly hers ? "

Polly drew herself up affronted.

" I am not a little girl ; I am fourteen."

" What a great age, and what a literal Polly !" taking her hands, and looking at her with an amused twinkle in his eyes. " Last night you certainly looked nothing but a good little girl,

singing hymns at my feet ; but to-day you are bridling like a young princess ; you are as fond of transformation as Proteus."

" Who is Proteus ? "

" A sea-god—but there is your breakfast ; the catechism must wait till afterwards. I mean to introduce you to Mrs. Cranford in proper style. Miss Lambert, is your coffee always so good ? I trust not, or my presence may prove harassing at the breakfast-table."

" It is excellent, Aunt Milly :" the last from Richard.

Mildred hoped the tone of hearty commendation would not reach Olive's ear, as her German grammar lay by her plate as usual ; but she only looked up and nodded pleasantly.

" I never could make coffee nicely ; you must teach me, Aunt Milly," and dropped her eyes on her book again.

" No paltry jealousy there," thought Mildred ; and she sat behind her urn well pleased, for even Arnold had roused himself once to ask for his cup to be replenished. Mildred had been called away on some household business, and on her return she found Dr. Heriot alone, reading the paper. He put it down as she entered.

" Well, is Nan formidable ? "

"Her dialect is," returned Mildred, smiling; "I am afraid she looks upon me in the light of an interloper. I hope she does not always mean to call me 't'maister's sister.'"

"Probably. Nan has her idiosyncrasies, but they are rather puzzling than dangerous; she is a type of the old Daleswoman, sturdy, independent, and sharp-tongued; but she is a good creature in the main, though a little contemptuous on 'women-foaks.' I believe Dick is her special favourite, though she told him once 'he's niver off a grummle, and that she was fair stot t' deeth wi't sound on't,' if you know what that means."

Mildred shook her head.

"You must not expect too much respect to a Southerner at first. I did battle on your behalf before you came, Miss Lambert, and got terribly worsted. 'Bless me, weel, Doctor!' says Nan, 'what's the matter that t'maister's sister come here? I can do verra weel by messel', and Miss Olive can fend for hersel'; it's nought but daftness, but it's ne'er my business; if they please themselves they please me. I must bide t' bitterment.'"

Mildred gave one of her quiet laughs.

"Nan and I will be great friends soon; we must learn to respect each other's prejudices. Poor Olive

had not a chance of putting in a word. Nan treated her as though she were a mere infant."

"She has known her ever since she was one, you see, Miss Lambert. I have been putting Polly through her paces, and find she has plenty to learn and unlearn."

"I suppose she has been tolerably well educated?"

"Pretty fairly, but after a desultory fashion. I fancy she has picked up knowledge somehow, as a bird picks up crumbs; her French accent is perfect, and she knows a little German. She is mostly deficient in English. I must have a long talk with Mrs. Cranford."

"I understood Polly was to take lessons from her?"

"You must take an early opportunity of making her acquaintance; she is truly excellent; the girls are fortunate in having such an instructress. Do you know, Chrissy is already a fair Latin scholar."

"Chrissy! you mean Olive, surely?"

"No, Chriss is the bluestocking—does Euclid with the boys, and already develops a taste for mathematics. Mr. Lambert used to direct her severer studies. I believe Richard does it now. Olive's talents lie in quite another direction."

"I am anxious to know—is she really clever?" asked Mildred, astonished at this piece of information.

"I believe she is tolerably well read for a girl of her age, and is especially fond of languages—the modern ones I mean—though her father has taught her Latin. I have always thought myself, that under that timid and lethargic exterior there is a vast amount of imaginative force—certain turns of speech in her happier moments prove it to me. I should not be surprised if we live to discover she has genius."

"I am convinced that hers is no ordinary mind," returned Mildred, seriously; "but her goodness somehow pains one."

Dr. Heriot laughed.

"Have you ever heard Roy's addition to the table of weights and measures, 'How many scruples make an olive?'" he asked. "My dear Miss Lambert, that girl is a walking conscience; she has the sort of mind that adds, subtracts, divides, and multiplies duties, till the grasshopper becomes a burden; she is one of the most thoroughly uncomfortable Christians I ever knew. It is a disease," he continued, more gravely, "a form of internal and spiritual hyperclimacteric, and must be treated as such."

“ I wish she were more like your ward,” replied Mildred, anxiously ; “ Polly is so healthy and girlish —she lives too much to have time for always probing her feelings.”

“ You are right,” was the answer. “ Polly is just the happy medium, neither too clever nor too stupid—a loving-hearted child, who will one of these days develop into a loving-hearted woman. Is she not delicious with her boyish head and piquante face—pretty too, don’t you think so ? ” And as the sound of the girls’ voices reached them at this moment, Dr. Heriot rose, and a few minutes afterwards Mildred saw him cross the court, with Polly and Chrissy hanging on each arm.

CHAPTER VIII.

“ ETHEL THE MAGNIFICENT.”

“ A maid of grace and complete majesty.”

LATER on in the morning Mildred was passing by the door of her brother's study, when she heard his voice calling to her. He was sitting in his usual chair, with his back to the light, reading, but he laid down his book directly.

“ Are you busy, Mildred ? ”

“ Not if you want me,” she returned, brightly. “ I was just thinking I had hardly spoken to you to-day.”

“ The same thought was lying heavy on my conscience. Heriot tells me you are looking better already. I hope you are beginning to feel at home with us, my dear.”

“ With you, Arnold—do you need to ask ? ” Mildred returned, reproachfully. But the tears started to her eyes.

“ And the children are good to you ? ” he continued, a little anxiously.

“ They are everything I can wish. Cardie is

most thoughtful for my comfort, and Olive is fast losing her shyness. The only thing I regret is that I manage to see so little of you, Arnold.”

He patted her hand gently. “It is better so, my dear. I am poor company, I fear, and have grown into strangely unsociable ways. They are good children ; but you must not let them spoil me, Mildred. Sometimes I think I ought to rouse myself more for their sakes.”

“Indeed, Arnold, their conduct is most exemplary. Neither Cardie nor Roy ever seem to let you go out alone.”

“Ay, ay,” he muttered ; “his mother was right. The lad is beyond his years, and has a wise head on young shoulders. Heriot tells me I must be looking out for a curate. I had some notion of waiting for Richard, but he will have it the work is beyond me.”

Mildred was silent. She thought any work, however exhausting, was better than the long, lonely hours passed in the study—hours during which his children were denied admittance, and for which all Richard’s mannishness was not allowed to find a remedy ; and yet, as she looked at the wan, thin face, and weary stoop of the figure, might it not be that Dr. Heriot was right ?

“ Heriot has heard of some one at Durham who is likely to suit me, he thinks ; he wants me to have him down. By the bye, Mildred, how do you get on with Heriot ? ”

“ He is very nice,” she returned, vaguely, rather taken aback by the suddenness of the question. “ Such a general favourite could not fail to please,” she continued, a little mischievously.

“ Ah, you are laughing at us. Well, Heriot is our weak point, I confess. Cardie is not given to raptures, but he has not a word to say against him, and Trelawny is always having him up at Kirkleatham. Kirkby Stephen could not do without Heriot now.”

“ He is clever in his profession, then ? ”

“ Very. And then so thoroughly unselfish ; he would go twenty miles to do any one a service, and take as much pains to hide it afterwards. I shall be disappointed indeed, Mildred, if you and he do not become good friends.”

“ Dear Arnold, he is a perfect stranger to me yet. I like him quite well enough to wish to see more of him. There seems some mystery about him,” she continued, hesitating ; for Mildred, honest and straightforward by nature, was a foe to all mysteries.

"Only the mystery of a disappointed life. He has no secrets with us—he never had. We knew him when we lived at Lambeth, and even then his story was well known to us."

"Betha told me he had given up a large West-end practice in consequence of severe domestic trouble. She hinted once that he had a bad wife."

"She was hardly deserving of the name. I have heard that she was nine years older than he, and a great beauty; a woman, too, of marvellous fascination, and gifted beyond the generality of her sex, and that he was madly in love when he married her."

"Perhaps the love was only on his side?"

"Alas! yes. He found out, when it was too late, that she had accepted him out of pique, and that his rival was living. The very first days of their union were embittered by the discovery that jealousy had forged these life-long fetters for them, and that already remorse was driving his unhappy bride almost frantic. Can you conceive the torment for poor Heriot? He could not set her free, though he loved her so that he would willingly have laid down his life to give her peace. She had no mother living, or he would have sent her away when he saw how distasteful his presence was

to her ; but, though she had murdered his happiness as well as her own, he was bound to be her protector.”

“ He was right,” returned Mildred, in a low voice.

“ Ay, and he acted nobly. • Instead of overwhelming her with reproaches that could have done no good, or crushing her still more with his coldness, he forgave her, and set himself to win the heart that proved itself so unworthy of his forbearance. Any other husband would have thought himself injured beyond reparation, but not so Heriot. He hid his wretchedness, and by every means in his power tried to lighten the burthen of his domestic misery.”

“ But people must have seen it ? ”

“ Not through his complaint, for he ever honoured her. I have been told by those who knew him at the time, that his conduct to her was blameless, and that they marvelled at the gentleness with which he bore her wayward fits. After the birth of their only child there was an interval of comparative comfort ; in her weakness there was a glimmering of compassion for the man she had injured, and who was the father of her boy. Heriot was touched by the unusual kindness of her manner ; there were even tears in her eyes when

he took the little creature in his arms and noticed the long eyelashes, so like his mother's."

"But the child died?"

"Yes—'the little peace-maker,' as Heriot fondly called it. But certainly all peace was buried in its little grave; for it was during the months that followed her child's loss that Margaret Heriot developed that unwholesome craving for stimulants which afterwards grew to absolute disease, and which was to wear out her husband's patience into slow disgust and then into utter weariness of life."

"Oh, Arnold, I never suspected this!"

"It was just then we made his acquaintance, and, as a priest, he sought my help and counsel in ministering to what was indeed a diseased mind; but, poor misguided woman! she would not see me. In her better moments she would cling to Heriot, and beg him to save her from the demon that seemed to possess her. She even knelt and asked his forgiveness once; but no remedy that he could recommend could be effectual in the case of one who had never been taught to deny herself a moment's gratification. I shudder to think of the scenes to which she subjected him, of the daily torture and uncertainty in which he lived: his was

the mockery of a home. Her softer feelings had in time turned to hate ; she never spoke to him at last but to reproach him with being the cause of her misery."

"Then it was this that induced him to give up his London practice ?"

"Yes. It was a strange act of his ; but I verily believe the man was broken-hearted. He had grown to loathe his life, and the spectacle of her daily degradation made him anxious to shake off friends and old belongings. I believe, too, she had contracted serious debts, and he was anxious to take her out of the way of temptation. Heriot was always a creature of impulse ; his chief motive in following us here was to bury himself socially, though I think our friendship had even then become necessary to him. At one time he trusted, too, that the change might be beneficial for her ; but he soon found out his mistake."

"They say that women who have contracted this fatal habit are so seldom cured," sighed Mildred.

"God help their husbands !" ejaculated Mr. Lambert. "I always thought myself that the poor creature was possessed, for her acts certainly bordered on frenzy. He found at last that he was fighting against mental disease, but he refused all

advice to place her under restraint. ‘I am her husband,’ he said once to me; ‘I have taken her for better and worse. But there will be no better for her, my poor Margaret; she will not be long with me—there is another disease at work; let her die in her husband’s home.’”

“But did she die there? I thought Betha told me she was away from him.”

“Yes, he had sent her with her nurse to the sea, meaning to join them, when news reached him that she was rapidly failing. The release came none too soon. Poor creature! she had suffered martyrdom; it was by her own wish that he was called, but he arrived too late—the final attack was very sudden. And so, as he said, the demon that had tormented her was cast out for ever. ‘Anything more grandly beautiful than she looked could not be imagined.’ But what touched him most was to find among the treasures she had secretly hidden about her, an infant’s sock and a scrap of downy hair; and faintly, almost illegibly, traced on the paper by her dying hand, ‘My little son’s hair, to be given to his father.’ Ah, Mildred, my dear, you look ready to weep; but, alas! such stories are by no means rare, and during my ministry I have met with others almost as sad as Heriot’s.

His troubles are over now, poor fellow, though doubtless they have left lifelong scars. Grieved as he has been, he may yet see the fruit of his noble forbearance in that tardy repentance and mute prayer for forgiveness. Who knows but that the first sight that may meet his eyes in the other world may be Margaret, 'sitting clothed and in her right mind at her Master's feet'?"

Never had Mildred seen her brother more roused and excited than during the recital of his friend's unhappy story, while in herself it had excited a degree of emotion that was almost painful.

"It shows how carefully we should abstain from judging people from their outward appearance," she remarked, after a short interval of silence. "When I first saw Dr. Heriot I thought there was something a little repellent in that dark face of his, but when he spoke he gave me a more pleasing impression."

"He has his bitter moods at times; no one could pass through such an ordeal quite unscathed. I am afraid he will never marry again; he told me once that the woman did not live whom he could love as he loved Margaret."

"She must have been very beautiful."

"I believe her chief charm lay in her wonderful fascination of manner. Heriot is a severe critic in feminine beauty; he is singularly fastidious; he will not allow that Miss Trelawny is handsome, though I believe she is generally considered to be so. But I must not waste any more time in gossiping about our neighbours. By the bye, Mildred, you must prepare for an inundation of visitors this afternoon."

Mr. Lambert was right. Mildred, to her great surprise, found herself holding a reception, which lasted late into the afternoon; at one time there was quite a block of waggonettes and pony carriages in the courtyard; and but for her brother's kindness in remaining to steer her through the difficulties of numerous introductions, she might have found her neighbours' goodwill a little perplexing.

She had just decided in her own mind that Mrs. Sadler was disagreeable, and the Northcotes slightly presuming and in bad style, and that Mrs. Heath was as rosy and commonplace as her husband, when they took their leave, and another set of visitors arrived who were rather more to Mildred's taste.

These were the Delameres of Castlesteads. The
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Reverend Stephen Delamere was a tall, ascetic-looking man, with quiet, well-bred manners, in severe clerical costume. His wife had a simple, beautiful face, and was altogether a pleasant, comely-looking creature, but her speech was somewhat homely ; and Mildred thought her a little over-dressed : the pink cheeks and smiling eyes hardly required the pink ribbons and feathers to set them off. Their only child, a lad of ten years, was with them, and Mildred, who was fond of boys, could not help admiring the bold gipsy face and dark eyes.

“ I am afraid Claude is like me, people say so,” observed Mrs. Delamere, turning her beaming face on Mildred. “ I would much rather he were like his father ; the Delameres are all good-looking ; old Mr. Delamere was ; Stephen called him after his grandfather ; I think Claude such a pretty name ; Claude Lorraine Delamere : Lorraine is a family name, too ; not mine, you know,” dimpling more than ever at the idea ; “ good gracious, the Greysons don’t own many pretty names among them.”

“ Susie, I have been asking our friend Richard to take an early opportunity of driving his aunt over to Castlesteads,” interrupted her husband, with

an uneasy glance, “and we must make Miss Lambert promise to bring over her nieces to the Rush-bearing.”

Mrs. Delamere clapped her plump hands together joyously, showing a slit in her pink glove as she did so.

“I am so glad you have mentioned that, Stephen, I might have forgotten it. Miss Lambert, you must come to us ; you must indeed. The Chestertons of the Hall are sure to ask you ; but you must remember you are engaged to us.”

“The Rush-bearing,” repeated Mildred, somewhat perplexed.

“It is an old Westmorland custom,” explained Mr. Delamere ; “it is kept on St. Peter’s Day, and is a special holiday with us. I believe it was revived in the last century at Great Musgrave,” he continued, looking at Mr. Lambert for confirmation of the statement.

“Yes, but it did not long continue ; it has been revived again of late ; it is a pretty sight, Mildred, and well worth seeing ; the children carry garlands instead of rushes to the church, where service is said ; and afterwards there is a dance in the park, and sports, such as wrestling, pole-leaping, and trotting-matches, are carried on all the afternoon.”

"But what is the origin of such a custom, Arnold?"

"It dates from the time when our forefathers used green rushes instead of carpets, the intention being to bless the rushes on the day of the patron saint."

"You must permit me to contradict you in one particular, Lambert, as our authorities slightly differ. The real origin of the custom was that, on the day of the patron saint, the church was strewn with fresh rushes, the procession being headed by a girl dressed in white, and wearing a crown; but Miss Lambert looks impressed," he continued, with a serious smile; "you must come and see it for yourself. Chrissy tells me she is too old to wear a crown this year. Some of our ladies show great taste in the formation of their garlands."

"May Chesterton's is always the prettiest. Do you mean to dance with May on the green this year, Claude?" asked Mrs. Delamere, turning to her boy.

Claude shook his head and coloured disdainfully.

"I am going in for the foot-race; father says I may," he returned, proudly.

"May is his little sweetheart; he has been faithful to her ever since he was six years old. Uncle Greyson says——"

"Susie, we must be going," exclaimed her husband, hastily. "You must not forget the Chestertons and Islip are dining with us to-night. Claude, my boy, bid Miss Lambert good-bye. My wife and I hope to see you very soon at the vicarage."

"Yes, come soon," repeated Mrs. Delamere, with a comfortable squeeze of her hand and more smiles. "Stephen is always in such a hurry ; but you must pay us a long visit, and bring that poor girl with you. Yes, I am ready, Stephen," as a frown of impatience came over her husband's face. "You know of old what a sad gossip I am ; but there, what are women's tongues given them for if they are not to be used ?" and Susie looked up archly at the smooth, blue-shaven face, that was slow to relax into a smile.

Mildred hoped that these would be her last visitors, but she was mistaken, for a couple of harmless maiden ladies, rejoicing in the cognomen of *Ortolan*, took their places, and chirruped to Mildred in shrill little bird-like voices. Mildred, who had plenty of quiet humour of her own, thought they were not unlike a pair of love-birds Arnold had once given her, the little sharp faces, and hooked noses, and light prominent eyes were not

unlike them ; and the bright green shawls, bordered with yellow palm-leaves, completed the illusion. They were so wonderfully alike, too, the only perceptible difference being that Miss Tabitha had grey curls, and a velvet band, and talked more ; and Miss Prissy had a large miniature of an officer, probably an Ortolan too, adorning her small brown wrist.

They talked to Mildred breathlessly about the mothers' meeting, and the clothing-club, and the savings' bank.

“ Such a useful institution of dear Mr. Lambert's,” exclaimed Miss Prissy.

“ The whole parish is so well conducted,” echoed her sister with a tremulous movement of the head and curls, “ we think ourselves blessed in our pastor, Miss Lambert,” in a perfectly audible whisper ; “ such discourses, such clear doctrine and Bible-truth, such resignation manifested under such a trying dispensation. Oh dear, Prissy,” interrupting herself, as a stanhope, with a couple of dark brown horses, was driven into the court with some little commotion, “ here is the squire, and what will he say at our taking the precedence of him, and making bold to pay our respects to Miss Lambert ? ”

“ He would say you are very kind neighbours, I

hope," returned Mildred, trying not to smile, and wondering when her ordeal would be over. Her brother had not effected his escape yet, and his jaded face was a tacit reproach to her. Richard, who had ushered in their previous visitors, and had remained yawning in the background, brightened up visibly.

"Here are the Trelawneys, sir; it is very good of them to call so soon."

"It is only what I should have expected, Cardie," returned his father, with mild indifference. "Mr. Trelawny is a man of the world, and knows what is right, that is all."

And Richard for once looked crestfallen.

"Dear now, but doesn't she look a beauty," whispered Miss Tabitha, ecstatically, as Miss Trelawny swept into the room on her father's arm, and greeted Mildred civilly, but without effusion, and then seated herself at some little distance, where Richard immediately joined her, the squire meanwhile taking up a somewhat lofty attitude on the hearthrug, directly facing Mildred.

Mildred thought she had never seen a finer specimen of an English gentleman; the tall, well-knit figure, the clear-cut face, and olive complexion, relieved by the snow-white hair, made up a very

striking exterior ; perhaps the eyes were a little cold and glassy-looking, but on the whole it could not be denied that Mr. Trelawny was a very aristocratic-looking man.

His manners were easy and polished, and he was evidently well-read on many subjects. Nevertheless a flavour of condescension in his tone gave Mildred an uneasy conviction that she was hardly appearing to her best advantage. She was painfully aware once or twice of a slight hesitation marring a more than usually well-worded sentence, and could see it was at once perceived.

Mildred had never considered herself of great consequence, but she had a certain wholesome self-respect which was grievously wounded by the patronising indulgence that rectified her harmless error.

“ I felt all at once as though I were nobody, and might be taken up for false pretensions for trying to be somebody,” as she expressed it to Dr. Heriot afterwards, who laughed and said—

“ Very true.”

Mildred would have risen to seat herself by Miss Trelawny, but the squire’s elaborate observations allowed her no reprieve. Once or twice she strove to draw her into the conversation ; but a turn of

the head, and a brief answer, more curt than agreeable, was all that rewarded her efforts. Nevertheless Mildred liked her voice; it had a pleasant crispness in it, and the abruptness was not unmusical.

Mildred only saw her full face when she rose to take leave: her figure was very graceful, but her features could hardly be termed beautiful; though the dead brown hair, with its waves of ripples, and the large brilliant eyes, made her a decidedly striking-looking girl.

Mildred, who was somewhat Quaker-like in her taste, thought the cream-coloured silk, with its ruby velvet facings, somewhat out of place in their homely vicarage, though the Rubens hat was wonderfully picturesque; it seemed less incongruous when Miss Trelawny remarked casually that they were on their way to a garden-party.

"Do you like archery? Papa is thinking of getting up a club for the neighbourhood," she said, looking at Mildred as she spoke. In spite of their dark brilliancy there was a wild, hungry look in her eyes that somehow haunted Mildred. They looked like eyes that were demanding sympathy from a world that failed to understand them.

It was not to be expected that Mildred would

be prepossessed by Miss Trelawny in a first visit. Not for weeks, nor for long afterwards, did she form a true estimate of her visitor, or learn the idiosyncrasies of a character at once peculiar and original.

People never understood Ethel Trelawny. There were subtle difficulties in her nature that baffled and repelled them. "She was odd," they said, "so unusual altogether, and said such queer things;" a few even hinted that it was possible that a part might sometimes be acted.

Miss Trelawny was nineteen now, and had passed through two London seasons with indifferent success, a fact more to be commented upon as her attractions certainly were very great; without being exactly beautiful, she yet gave an impression of beauty, and certain tints of colour and warm lights made her at times almost brilliant. In a crowded ball-room she was always the centre of observation; but one by one her partners dropped off, displeased and perplexed by the scarifying process to which they had been subjected.

"People come to dance and not to think," observed one young cornet, turning restive under such treatment, and yet obstinate in his admiration of Ethel. He had been severely scorched during

a previous dance, but had returned to the charge most gallantly ; "the music is delicious ; do take one more turn with me ; there is a clear space now."

"Do people ever think ; does that man, for example ?" returned Ethel, indicating a tall man before them, who was pulling his blonde moustache with an expression of satisfied vacuity ; "what sort of dwarfed soul lives in that six feet or so of human matter ?"

"Miss Trelawny, you are too bad," burst out her companion with an expression of honest wrath that showed him not far removed from boyhood. "That fellow is the bravest and the kindest-hearted in our regiment. He nursed me, by Jove, that he did, when I was down with fever in the hunting-box last year. Not think—Robert Drummond not think," and he doubled his fist with an energy that soon showed a gash in the faultless lavender kid glove.

"I like you all the better for your defence of your friend," returned Ethel calmly, and she turned on him a smile so frank and sweet that the young man was almost dazzled. "If one cannot think, one should at least feel. If I give you one turn more, I dare say you will forgive me," and from that moment she and Charlie Treherne were firm friends.

But others were not so fortunate, and retired crestfallen and humiliated. One of Charlie's brother-officers, whom he introduced to Ethel in a fit of enthusiasm, as "our major, and a man every inch of him, one of the sort who would do the charge at Balaclava again," subsided into sulkiness and total inanity, on finding that instead of discussing Patti and the last opera, Ethel was bent on discovering the ten missing tribes of Israel.

"How hot this room is. They don't give us enough ventilation, I think," gasped the worthy major, at length.

"I was just thinking it was so cool. You are the third partner I have had who has complained of the heat. If you are tired of this waltz, let us sit down in that delightful conservatory;" but as the major, with a good deal of unnecessary energy, declared he could dance till daybreak without fatigue, Ethel quietly continued her discourse.

"I have a theory. I forget from whom I first gathered it, that we shall be discovered to be the direct descendants of the tribe of Gad. Look round this room, Major Hartstone, you will find a faint type of Jewish features on many a face; that girl with the dark *crêpé* hair especially. I consider we shall play a prominent part in the millennium."

"Millennium—aw; you are too droll, Miss Trelawny. I can see a joke as well as most people, but you go too deep for me. Fancy what Charlie will say when I tell him that he belongs to the tribe of Gad—tribe of Gad—aw—aw—" and as the major, unable to restrain his hilarity any longer, burst into a fit of hearty laughter, Ethel, deeply offended, desired him to lead her to her place.

It was no better in the Row, where Miss Trelawny rode daily with her father, her beautiful figure and superb horsemanship attracting all eyes. At first she had quite a little crowd of loungers round her, but they dispersed by degrees.

"Do you see that girl—Miss Boville?" asked one in a languid drawl, as Ethel reined her horse up under a tree, and sat looking dreamily over the shifting mass of carriages and gaily-dressed pedestrians; "she is awfully handsome; don't you think so?"

"I don't know. I have not thought about it," she returned, abstractedly; "the question is, Captain Ellison, has she a beautiful soul?"

"My dear Miss Trelawny, you positively startle me; you are so unlike other people. I only know she has caught Medwin and his ten thousand a year."

“Poor thing,” was the answer, leaning over and stroking her horse’s neck thoughtfully. “Touched—quite touched,” observed the young man, significantly tapping his forehead, as Ethel rode by—“must be a little queer, you know, or she would not say such things—sort of craze or hallucination—do you know if it be in the family?”

“Nonsense, it is only an ill-arranged mind airing its ideas; she is delightfully young and fresh,” returned his companion, a clever barrister, who had the wit to read a girl’s vagarisms aright, as the volcanic eruptions of an undisciplined and unsatisfied nature.

But it would not do; people passed over Ethel for other girls, who were comparatively plain and ordinary, but whose thinking powers were more under control. One declaration had indeed been made, but it was received by such sad wonder on Ethel’s part, that the young man looked at her in reproachful confusion.

“Surely you cannot have mistaken my attentions, Miss Trelawny? As a man of honour, I thought it right to come to a clear understanding; if I have ventured to hope too much, I trust you will tell me so.”

“Do you mean, you wish to marry me?” asked Ethel, in a tone of regret and dismay.

Arthur Sullivan had been a special favourite with her ; he had listened to her rhapsodies good-humouredly, and had forbore to laugh at them ; he was good-looking too, and possessed of moderate intelligence, and they had got on very well together during a whole season. It was with a sensation of real pain that she heard him avow his intentions.

" There is some mistake. I have never led you to believe that I would ever be your wife," she continued, turning pale, and her eyes filling with tears.

" No, Ethel—never," he answered, hurriedly, " you are no flirt. If any one be to blame, it is I, for daring to hope I could win you."

" Indeed it is I that do not deserve you," she returned, sadly ; " but it is not your fault that you cannot give me what I want. Perhaps I expect too much ; perhaps I hardly know what it is I really do want."

" May I wait till you find out ? " he asked, earnestly ; " real love is not to be despised, even though it be accompanied with little wisdom."

The white lids dropped heavily over the eyes, and for a moment she made no answer ; only as he rose from her side, and walked up and down in his agitation, she rose too, hurriedly.

“It cannot be—I feel it—I know it—you are too good to me, Mr. Sullivan; and I want something more than goodness—but—but—does my father know?”

“Can you doubt it?”

“Then he will never forgive me for refusing you. Oh, what a hard thing it is to be a woman, and to wait for one’s fate, instead of going out to seek it. Now I have lost my friend in finding a lover, and my father’s anger will be bitter against me.”

Ethel was right; in refusing Arthur Sullivan, she had refused the presumptive heir to a baronetcy, and Mr. Trelawny’s ambitious soul was sorely vexed within him.

“You have never been of any use or comfort to me, Ethel, and you never will,” he said, harshly; “just as I was looking to you to redeem matters, you are throwing away this chance. What was the fault with the young fellow? you seemed fond enough of him at one time; he is handsome and gentlemanly enough to please any girl; but it is just one of your fads.”

“He is very amiable, but his character wants backbone, papa. When I marry, my husband must be my master; I have no taste for holding the reins myself.”

"When you marry: I wish you would marry, Ethel, for all the comfort you are to me. If my boys had lived—but what is the use of wishing for anything."

"Papa," she returned with spirit, "I cannot help being a girl; it is my misfortune, not my fault. I wish I could satisfy you better," she continued, softly, "but it seems as though we grew more apart every day."

"It is your own fault," he returned, morosely. "Marry Arthur Sullivan, and I will promise to think better of your sense."

"I cannot, papa. I am not going to marry any one," she answered, in the suppressed voice he knew so well. And then, as though fearful the argument might be continued, she quietly left the room.

CHAPTER IX.

KIRKLEATHAM.

“ And on we went ; but ere an hour had passèd
We reach'd a meadow slanting to the north,
Down which a well-worn pathway courted us
To one green wicket in a privet-hedge,
This, yielding, gave into a grassy walk
Through crowded lilac-ambush trimly pruned ;
And one warm gust, full fed with perfume, blew
Beyond us, as we enter'd in the cool.
The garden stretches southward.”—*Tennyson*.

THE next few days passed quietly enough. Mildred, who had now assumed the entire management of the household, soon discovered that Olive's four months of misrule and shiftlessness had entailed on her an overplus of work, and, though she was never idle, she soon found that even her willing hands could hardly perform all the tasks laid on them, and that scarcely an interval of leisure was available throughout the day.

“ It will not be always so,” she remarked, cheerfully, when Richard took upon himself to

remonstrate with her. "When I have got things a little more into order, I mean to have plenty of time to myself. Polly and I have planned endless excursions to Podgill and the out-wood, to stock the new fernery Roy is making for us, and I hope to accompany your father sometimes when he goes to Nateley and Winton."

"Nevertheless, I mean to drive you over to Brough to-day. You must come, Aunt Milly. You are looking pale, Dr. John says, and the air will do you good. Huddle all those things into the basket," he continued, in a peremptory voice that amused Mildred, and, acting on his words, he swept the neat pile of dusters and tea-cloths, that lay beside her, into Olive's unlucky mending-basket, and then faced round on her with his most persuasive air. "It is such a delicious day, and you have been working like a galley-slave ever since you got up this morning," he said, apologetically. "My father would be quite troubled if he knew how hard you work. Do you know Dr. John threatens to tell him?"

"Dr. John had better mind his own business," returned Mildred, colouring. "Very well, Richard, you shall have your way as usual ; my head aches rather, and a drive will be refreshing. Perhaps

you could drop me at Kirkleatham on our way home. I must return Miss Trelawny's visit."

Richard assented with alacrity, and then bidding Mildred be ready for him in ten minutes, he hastened from the room.

Mildred had noticed a great change in Richard during the last week; he seemed brighter, and was less carping and disagreeable in his manners to Olive; and though he still snubbed her at times, there was an evident desire to preserve harmony in the family circle, which the others were not slow to appreciate.

In many little ways he showed Mildred that he was grateful to her for the added comfort of her presence; any want of regularity and order was peculiarly trying to him; and now that he was no longer aggravated by Olive's carelessness and left-handed ways, he could afford even to be gracious to her, especially as Mildred had succeeded in effecting some sort of reformation in the offending hair and dress.

"There, now you look nice, and Cardie will say so," she said, as she fastened up the long braids, which now looked bright and glossy, and then settled the collar, which was as usual somewhat awry, and tied the black ribbon into a natty bow.

"A little more time and care would not be wasted, Olive. We have no right to tease other people by our untidy ways, or to displease their eyes, it is as much an act of selfishness as of indolence, and may be encouraged until it becomes a positive sin."

"Do you think so, Aunt Milly?"

"I am sure of it. Chrissy thinks me hard on her, but so much depends on the habits we form when quite young. I believe with many persons tidiness is an acquired virtue; it requires some sort of education, and certainly not a little discipline."

"But, Aunt Milly, I thought some people were always tidy; from their childhood, I mean. Chriss and I never were," she continued, sorrowfully.

"Some people are methodical by nature; Cardie, for example. They early see the fitness and beauty of order. But, Olive, for your comfort, I am sure it is to be acquired."

"Not by me, Aunt Milly."

"My dear—why not? It is only a question of patience and discipline. If you made the rule now of never going to a drawer in a hurry. When Chrissy wants anything, she jerks

contents of the whole drawer on the floor ; I have found her doing it more than once."

" She could not find her gloves, and Cardie was waiting," returned Olive, always desirous of screening another's fault.

" Yes ; but she left it to you to pick up all the things again. If Chriss's gloves were in their right place, no one need have been troubled. I could find my gloves blindfold."

" I am always tidying my own and Chrissy's drawers, Aunt Milly ; but in a few days they are as bad as ever," returned Olive, helplessly.

" Because you never have time to search quietly for a thing. Did you look in the glass, Olive, while you were doing your hair this morning ? "

" I don't know. I think so. I was learning my German verses, I believe."

" So Cardie had a right to grumble over your crooked parting, and unkempt appearance. You should keep your duties like the contents of your drawers, neatly piled on the top of each other. No lady can arrange her hair properly and do German at the same time. Tell me, Olive, you have not so many headaches since I got your father to forbid your sitting up so late at night."

" No, Aunt Milly ; but all the same I wish you

and he had not made the rule ; it used to be such a quiet time."

" And you learn all the quicker since you have had regular walks with Polly and Chriss."

" I am less tired after my lessons, certainly. I thought that was because you took away the mending-basket ; the stooping made my back ache, and—"

" I see," returned Mildred, with a satisfied smile.

Olive's muddy complexion was certainly clearer, and there was less heaviness in her gait, since she had judiciously insisted that the hours of rest should be kept intact. It had cost Olive some tears, however, for that quiet time when the household were sleeping round her was very precious to the careworn girl.

Richard gave vent to an audible expression of pleasure when he noticed his sister's altered appearance, and his look of approbation was most pleasant to Mildred.

" If you would only hold yourself up, and smile sometimes, you would really look as well as other people," was the qualified praise he gave her.

" I am glad you are pleased," returned Olive, simply. " I never expect you to admire me, Cardie. I am plainer than any one else, I know."

"Yes; but you have nice eyes, and what a quantity of hair," passing his hand over the thick coils in which Mildred had arranged it. "She looks a different girl, does she not, Aunt Milly?"

"It is very odd, but I believe Cardie does not dislike me so much to-day," Olive said, when she wished her aunt good-night.

She and Polly took turns every night in coming into Mildred's room with little offers of service, but in reality to indulge in a cosy chat. It was characteristic of the girls that they never came together. Olive was silent and reserved before Polly, and Polly was at times a little caustic in her wit. "We mix as badly as oil and water," she said once. "I shall always think Olive the most tiresome creature in the world. Chriss is far more amusing."

"Why do you think so?" asked Mildred, gently. She was always gentle with Olive; these sort of weary natures need much patience and delicacy of handling, she thought.

"He speaks more kindly, and he has looked at me several times, not in his critical way, but as if he were not so much displeased at my appearance; but, Aunt Milly, it is so odd, his caring, I mean."

"Why so, my dear?"

“If I loved a person very much, I should not care how they looked ; they might be ugly or deformed, but it would make no difference. Cardie’s love seems to vary somehow.”

“Anything unsightly is very grievous to him, but not in the way you mean, Olive. He is peculiarly tender over any physical infirmity. I liked his manner so to little Cathy Villers to-day.”

“But all the same he attaches too much importance to merely outward things,” returned Olive, who sometimes showed tenacity in her opinions ; “not that I blame him,” she continued, as though she feared she had been uncharitable, “only that it is so odd.”

Mildred was in a somewhat gladsome mood as she prepared for her drive. Richard’s thoughtfulness pleased her ; on the whole things were going well with her. Under her judicious management, the household had fallen into more equable and tranquil ways. There were fewer jars, and more opportunity for Roy’s lurking spirit of fun to develop itself. She had had two or three stormy scenes with Chriss ; but the little girl had already learned to respect the gentle firmness that would not abate one iota of lawful authority.

“We are learning our verbs from morning to

night," grumbled Chriss, in a confidential aside to Roy; "that horrid one, 'to tidy,' you know. Aunt Milly is always in the imperative mood. I declare I am getting sick of it. Hannah or Rachel used to mend my gloves and things, and now she insists on my doing it myself. I broke a dozen needles one afternoon to spite her, but she gave me the thirteenth with the same sweet smile. It is so tiresome not to be able to provoke people."

But even Chrissy was secretly learning to value the kind forbearance that bore with her wayward fancies, and the skilfulness that helped her out of many a scrape. Mildred had made the rule that after six o'clock no lesson-books were to be opened. In the evening they either walked or drove, or sat on the lawn working, while Richard or Roy read aloud, Mildred taking the opportunity to overlook her nieces' work, and to remonstrate over the giant strides that Chriss's needle was accustomed to take. Even Olive owned these quiet times were very nice, while Mr. Lambert had once or twice been drawn into the charmed circle, and had paced the terrace in lieu of the churchyard, irresistibly attracted by the pleasant spectacle.

Mildred was doing wonders in her quiet way; she had already gained some insight into parish

matters ; she had accompanied her brother in his house-to-house visitation, and had been much struck by the absence of anything like distress. Poverty was there, but not hard-griping want. As a general rule the people were well-to-do, independent, and fairly respectable. One village, Nateley, had a forlorn and somewhat neglected appearance ; but the generality of Mr. Lambert's parishioners struck Mildred as far superior to the London poor whom she had visited.

As yet she had not seen the darker side of the picture ; she was shocked to hear Mr. Lambert speak on future occasions of the tendency to schism, and the very loose notions of morality that prevailed even among the better sort of people. The clergy had uphill work, he said. The new railway had brought a large influx of navvies, and the public-houses were always full.

“ The commandments are broken just as easily in sight of God’s hills as they are in the crowded and fetid alleys of our metropolis,” he said once. “ Human nature is the same everywhere, even though it be glossed over by outward respectability.”

Mildred had already come in contact with the Ortolans more than once, and had on many

occasions seen the green and yellow shawls flitting in and out of the cottages.

“They do a great deal of good, and are really very worthy creatures, in spite of their oddities,” observed Mr. Lambert once. “They live over at Hartley. There is a third one, an invalid, Miss Bathsheba, who is very different from the others, and is, I think, quite a superior person. When I think of the gallant struggle they have carried on against trouble and poverty, one is inclined to forgive their little whims: it takes all sorts of people to make up a world, Mildred.”

Mildred thoroughly enjoyed her drive. Richard was in one of his brightest moods, and talked with more animation than usual, and seeing that his aunt was really interested in learning all about their surroundings, he insisted on putting up the pony-carriage, and took Mildred to see the church and the castle.

The vicarage and churchyard were so pleasantly situated, and the latter looked so green and shady, that she was disappointed to find the inside of the church very bare and neglected-looking, while the damp earthy atmosphere spoke of infrequent services.

There were urgent need of repairs, and a general

shabbiness of detail that was pitiable ; the high wooden pews looked comfortless, ordinary candles evidently furnished a dim and insufficient light : Mildred felt quite oppressed as she left the building.

“ There can be no true Church - spirit here, Richard. Fancy worshipping in that damp, mouldy place ; are there no zealous workers here, who care to beautify their church ? ”

Richard shook his head. “ We cannot complain of our want of privileges after that. I have been speaking to my father, and I really fancy we shall acquire a regular choir next year, and if so we shall turn out the Morrisons and Gunnings. My father is over - lenient to people’s prejudices, it grieves him to disturb long-rooted customs.”

“ Where are we going now, Richard ? ”

“ To Brough Castle ; the ruin stands on a little hill just by ; it is one of the celebrated Countess of Pembroke’s castles. You know the legend, Aunt Milly ? ”

“ No, I cannot say that I do.”

“ She seems to have been a strong - minded person, and was always building castles. It was prophesied that as long as she went on building she would not die, and in consequence her rage for

castle-building increased with her age ; but at last there was a severe frost, during which no work could be carried on, and so the poor countess died."

"What a lovely view there is from here, Richard."

"Yes, that long level of green to our left is where the celebrated Brough fair is held. The country people use it as a date, 'last Brough Hill,' as they say — the word 'Brough' comes from 'Brugh,' a fortification. My father has written a very clever paper on the origin of the names of places ; it is really very interesting."

"Some of the names are so quaint, 'Smardale,' for example."

"Let me see, that has a Danish termination, and means Butter-dale—'dale' from 'dal,' a valley; Garsdale, grass-dale ; Sleddale, from 'slet,' plain, the open level plain or dale, and so on. I recollect my father told us that 'Kirkby,' on the contrary, is always of Christian origin, as 'Kirkby Stephen,' and 'Kirkby Kendal ;' but perhaps you are not fond of etymology, Aunt Milly."

"On the contrary, it is rather a favourite study of mine ; go on, Richard. I want to know how Kirkby Stephen got its name."

"I must quote my father again, then. He thinks

the victorious Danes found a kirk with houses near it, and called the place Kirkby, and they afterwards learnt that the church was dedicated to St. Stephen, the proto-martyr, and then added his name to distinguish it from the other Kirkbys."

"It must have been rather a different church, Richard."

"I see I must go on quoting. He says, 'We can almost picture to ourselves that low, narrow, quaint old church, with its rude walls and thatched roof.' But, Aunt Milly, we must be thinking of returning, if we are to call on the Trelawnys. By the by, what do you think of them?"

"Of Mr. Trelawny, you mean, for I certainly did not exchange three words with his daughter."

"I noticed she was very silent; she generally is when he is present. What a pity it is they do not understand each other better."

He seemed waiting for her to speak, but Mildred, who was taking a last lingering look at the ruin, was slow to respond.

"He seems very masterful," she said at last when they had entered the pony-carriage, and were driving homewards.

"Yes, and what is worse, so narrow in his views. He is very kind to me, and I get on with him

tolerably well," continued Richard, modestly.
"But I can understand the repressing influence under which she lives."

"It seems so strange for a father not to understand his daughter."

"I believe he is fond of her in his own way ; he can hardly help being proud of her. You see, he lost his two boys when they were lads in a dreadful way ; they were both drowned in bathing, and he has never got over their loss ; it is really very hard for him, especially as his wife died not very long afterwards. They say the shock killed her."

"Poor man, he has known no ordinary trouble. I can understand how lonely it must be for her."

"Yes, it is all the worse that she does not care for the people about here. With the exception of us and the Delawares, she has no friends, no intimate friends, I mean."

"Her exclusiveness is to blame, then ; our neighbours seem really very kind-hearted."

"Yes, but they are not her sort. I think you like the Delawares yourself, Aunt Milly ?"

"Very much. I was just going to ask you more about them. Mrs. Delaware is very nice, but it struck me that she is not equal to her husband."

"No ; he is a fine fellow. You see, she was only

a yeoman's daughter, and he educated her to be his wife."

"That accounts for her homely speech."

"My father married them. She was a perfect little rustic beauty, he says. She ran away from school twice, and at last told Mr. Delaware that he might marry her or not as he pleased, but she would have no more of the schooling; if she were not nice enough for him, she was for Farmer Morrison of Wharton Hall, and of course that decided the question."

"I hope she makes him a good wife."

"Very, and he is exceedingly fond of her, though she makes him uneasy at times. Her connections are not very desirable, and she can never be made to understand that they are to be kept in the back-ground. I have seen him sit on thorns during a whole evening, looking utterly wretched, while she dragged in Uncle Greyson and Brother Ben every other moment."

"I wish she would dress more quietly; she looks very unlike a clergyman's wife."

Richard smiled. "Miss Trelawny is very fond of driving over to Warcop Vicarage. She enjoys talking to Mr. Delaware, but I have noticed his wife looks a little sad at not being able to join in

their conversation ; possibly she regrets the schooling ; " but here Richard's attention was diverted by a drove of oxen, and as soon as the road was clear he had started a new topic, which lasted till they reached their destination.

Kirkleatham was a large red castellated building built on a slight eminence, and delightfully situated, belted in with green meadows, and commanding lovely views of soft distances ; that from the terrace in front of the house was especially beautiful, the church and town of Kirkby Stephen distinctly visible, and the grouping of the dark hills at once varied and full of loveliness.

As they drove through the shrubbery Richard had a glimpse of a white dress and a broad-brimmed hat, and stopping the pony-carriage, he assisted Mildred to alight.

" Here is Miss Trelawny, sitting under her favourite tree ; you had better go to her, Aunt Milly, while I find some one to take the mare ; " and as Mildred obeyed, Miss Trelawny laid down her book, and greeted her with greater cordiality than she had shown on the previous visit.

" Papa is somewhere about the grounds ; you can find him," she said when Richard came up to them, and as he departed somewhat reluctantly,

she led Mildred to a shady corner of the lawn, where some basket-chairs, and a round table strewn with work and books, made up a scene of rustic comfort.

The blue curling smoke rose from the distant town into the clear afternoon air, the sun shone on the old church tower, the hills lay in soft violet shadow.

“I hope you admire our view?” asked Miss Trelawny, with her full, steady glance at Mildred; and again Mildred noticed the peculiar softness, as well as brilliancy, of her eyes. “I think it is even more beautiful than that which you see from the vicarage windows. Mr. Lambert and I have often had a dispute on that subject.”

“But you have not the river—that gives such a charm to ours. I would not exchange those snatches of silvery brightness for your greater distances. What happiness beautiful scenery affords! hopeless misery seems quite incompatible with those ranges of softly-tinted hills.”

A pensive—almost a melancholy—look crossed Miss Trelawny’s face.

“The worst of it is, that our moods and Nature’s do not always harmonise; sometimes the sunshine has a chilling brightness when we are not exactly attuned to it. One must be really susceptible—in

fact, an artist—if one could find happiness in the mere circumstance of living in a beautiful district like ours."

"I hope you do not undervalue your privileges," returned Mildred, smiling.

"No, I am never weary of expatiating on them; but all the same, one asks a little more of life."

"In what way?"

"In every possible way," arching her brows, with a sort of impatience. "What do rational human beings generally require?—work—fellowship—possibly sympathy."

"All of which are to be had for the asking. Nay, my dear Miss Trelawny," as Ethel's slight shrug of the shoulders testified her dissent, "where human beings are more or less congregated, there can be no lack of these."

"They may possibly differ in the meaning we attach to our words. I am not speaking of the labour market, which is already glutted."

"Nor I."

"The question is," continued the young philosopher, wearily, "of what possible use are nine-tenths of the unmarried women? half of them marry to escape from the unbearable routine and vacuum of their lives."

Ethel spoke with such mournful candour, that Mildred's first feeling of astonishment changed into pity—so young and yet so cynical—and with such marginal wastes of unfulfilled purpose.

“When there is so much trouble and faultiness in the world,” she answered, “there must be surely work enough to satisfy the most hungry nature. Have you not heard it asserted, Miss Trelawny, that nature abhors a vacuum?”

To her surprise, a shade crossed Miss Trelawny's face.

“You talk so like our village Mentor, that I could almost fancy I were listening to him. Are there no duties but the seven corporal works of mercy, Miss Lambert? Is the intellect to play no part in the bitter comedy of women's lives?”

“You would prefer tragedy?” questioned Mildred, with a slight twitching of the corner of her mouth. It was too absurdly incongruous to hear this girl, radiant with health, and glorying in her youth, speaking of the bitter comedy of life. Mildred began to accuse her in her own mind of unreal sentiment, and the vaporous utterings of girlish spleen; but Ethel's intense earnestness disarmed her of this suspicion.

“I have no respect for the people; they are

utterly brutish, and incapable of elevation. I am horrifying you, Miss Lambert, but indeed I am not speaking without proof. At one time I took great interest in the parish, and used to hold mothers' meetings—pleasant evenings for the women. I used to give them tea, and let them bring their needlework, on condition they listened to my reading. Mr. Lambert approved of my plan ; he only stipulated that as I was so very young—in age, I suppose, he meant — that Miss Prissy Ortolan should assist me.”

“ And it was an excellent idea,” returned Mildred, warmly.

“ Yes, but it proved an utter failure,” sighed Ethel. “ The women liked the tea, and I believe they got through a great deal of needlework, only Miss Prissy saw after that ; but they cared no more for the reading than Minto would,” stooping down to pat the head of a large black retriever that lay at her feet. “ I had planned a course of progressive instruction, that should combine information with amusement ; but I found they preferred their own gossip. I asked one woman, who looked more intelligent than the others, how she had liked Jean Ingelow’s beautiful poem, *Two Brothers and a Sermon*, which I had thought simple enough to suit

even their comprehensions ; and she replied, ' Eh, it was fine drowsy stuff, and would rock off half-a-dozen crying babies.' "

Mildred smiled.

" I gave it up after that. I believe Miss Tabitha and Miss Prissy manage it. They read little tracts to them, and the women do not talk half so much ; but it's very disheartening to think one's theory had failed."

" You soared a little beyond them, you see."

" I suppose so ; but I thought their life was prosaic enough ; but here comes my father and Richard, I see they have Dr. Heriot with them."

Ethel spoke quietly, but Mildred thought there was a slight change in her manner, which became less animated.

Dr. Heriot looked both surprised and pleased when he saw Mildred ; he placed himself beside her, and listened with great interest to the account of their afternoon's drive. On this occasion, Mildred's quiet fluency did not desert her.

Mr. Trelawney was less stiff and ceremonious in his own house ; he insisted, with old-fashioned politeness, that they should remain for some refreshment, and he himself conducted Mildred to the top

of the tower, from which there was an extensive view.

On their return, they found a charming little tea-table set out under the trees ; and Ethel, in her white gown, with pink May blossoms in her hair, was crossing the lawn with Richard. Dr. Heriot was still lounging complacently in his basket-chair.

Ethel made a charming hostess ; but she spoke very little to any one but Richard, who hovered near her, with a happy boyish-looking face. Mildred had never seen him to such advantage ; he looked years younger, when the grave restraint of his manners relaxed a little ; and she was struck by the unusual softness of his dark eyes. In his best moods, Richard was undoubtedly attractive in the presence of elder men. He showed a modest deference to their opinions, and at the same time displayed such intelligence, that Mildred felt secretly proud of him. He was evidently a great favourite with Mr. Trelawny and his daughter. Ethel constantly appealed to him, and the squire scolded him for coming so seldom.

The hour was a pleasant one ; and Mildred thoroughly enjoyed it : just as they were dispersing, and the pony-carriage was coming round, Dr. Heriot approached Ethel.

“ Well, have you been to see poor Jessie ? ” he asked, a little anxiously.

Miss Trelawny shook her head.

“ You know I never promised,” she returned, as though trying to defend herself.

“ I never think it fair to extort promises—people’s better moods so rapidly pass away. If you remember, I only advised you to do so. I thought it would do you both good.”

“ You need not rank us in the same category,” she returned, proudly ; “ you are such a leveller of classes, Dr. Heriot.”

“ Forgive me, but when you reach Jessie’s standard of excellence, I would willingly do so. Jessie is a living proof of my theory—that we are all equal—and the education and refinement on which you lay such stress are only adventitious adjuncts to our circumstances. In one sense—we are old friends, Miss Trelawny ; and I may speak plainly, I know—I consider Jessie greatly your superior.”

A quick sensitive colour rose to Ethel’s face. They were walking through the shrubbery ; and for a moment she turned her long neck aside, as though to hide her pained look ; but she answered, calmly—

“ We differ so completely in our estimates of

things ; I am quite aware how high I stand in Dr. Heriot's opinion."

"Are you sure of that ?" answering her with the sort of amused gentleness with which one would censure a child. "I am apt to keep my thoughts to myself, and am not quite so easy to read as you are, Miss Trelawny. So you will not go and see my favourite Jessie ?" with a persuasive smile.

"No," she said, colouring high ; "I am not in the mood for it."

"Then we will say no more about it ; and my remedy has failed." But though he talked pleasantly to her for the remainder of the way, Mildred noticed he had his grave look, and that Ethel failed to rally her spirits.

CHAPTER X.

THE RUSH-BEARING.

“Heigho ! daisies and buttercups,
Fair yellow daffodils, stately and tall,
A sunshiny world full of laughter and leisure,
And fresh hearts unconscious of sorrow and thrall !
Send down on their pleasure smiles passing its measure,
God that is over us all.”—*Jean Ingelow.*

MILDRED soon became accustomed to Dr. Heriot's constant presence about the house, and the slight restraint she had at first felt rapidly wore off.

She soon looked upon it as a matter of course to see him at least three evenings in the week ; loneliness was not to his taste, and in consequence, when he was not otherwise engaged, he generally shared their evening meal at the vicarage, and remained an hour afterwards, talking to Mr. Lambert or Richard. Mildred ceased to start with surprise at finding him in the early morning turning over the books in her brother's study, or helping Polly and Chriss in their new fernery. Polly was made happy by frequent invitations to her guardian's house, where she soon made herself at home, coming

back to Mildred with delightful accounts of how her guardian had allowed her to dust his books and mend his gloves ; and how he had approved of the French coffee she had made him.

One afternoon Chriss and she had been in the kitchen, concocting all sorts of delicious messes, which Dr. Heriot, Cardie, and Roy were expected to eat afterwards.

Dr. Heriot gave an amusingly graphic account of the feast afterwards to Mildred, and his old housekeeper's astonishment at "them nasty and Frenchified dishes."

Polly had carried in the omelette herself, and placed it with a flushed, triumphant face before him, her dimpled elbows still whitened with flour ; the dishes were all charmingly garlanded with flowers and leaves—tiny breast-knots of geranium and heliotrope lay beside each plate. Polly had fastened a great cream-coloured rose into Olive's drooping braids, which she wore reluctantly.

" I wish you could have seen it all, Miss Lambert ; it was the prettiest thing possible ; they had transformed my bachelor's den into a perfect bower. Roy must have helped them, and given some of his artistic touches. There were great trailing sprays of ivy, and fern-fronds in my terra-cotta

vases, and baskets of wild roses and ox-eyed daisies; never was my *fête* day so charmingly inaugurated before. The worst of it was that Polly expected me to taste all her dishes in succession; and Chriss insisted on my eating a large slice of the frosted cake."

Mildred was not present at Dr. Heriot's birthday party; she had preferred staying with her brother, but she found he had not forgotten her; the guests were surprised in their turn by finding a handsome gift beside each plate, a print that Roy had long coveted, Trench on *Parables* for Richard, Schiller's works for Olive, a neat little writing-desk for Polly, and a silk-lined work-basket for Chriss, who coloured and looked uncomfortable over the gift. Polly had orders to carry a beautiful book on Ferns to Aunt Milly, and a slice of the iced-cake with Dr. Heriot's compliments, and regrets that she had not tasted the omelette—a message that Polly delivered with the utmost solemnity.

"Oh, it was so nice, Aunt Milly; Dr. Heriot is so good and indulgent. I think he is the best man living—just to please us he let us serve up the coffee in those beautiful cups without handles, that he values so, and that have cost I don't know how much money; and Olive dropped hers because she

said it burnt her fingers, and broke it all to fragments. Livy looked ready to cry, but Dr. Heriot only laughed, and would not let Cardie scold her."

"That was kind of Dr. Heriot."

"He is never anything but kind. I am sure some of the things disagreed with him, but he would taste them all ; and then afterwards—oh, Aunt Milly, it was so nice—we sang glees in the twilight, and when it got quite dark, he told us a splendid ghost-story—only it turned out a dream—which spoilt it rather ; and laughed at Chrissy and me because we looked a little pale when the lamp came in. I am sure Richard enjoyed it as well as us, for he rubbed his hands and said 'Excellent,' when he had finished."

Mildred looked at her book when the girls had retired, fairly wearied with chattering. It was just what she had wanted. How thoughtful of Dr. Heriot. Her name was written in full ; and for the first time she had a chance of criticising the bold, clear handwriting. "From a family friend —John Heriot," was written just underneath. After all, had it not been a little churlish of her to refuse going with the children ? The evening had gone very heavily with her ; her brother had been in one of his taciturn moods and had retired to his

room early ; and finding the house empty, and somewhat desolate, she had betaken herself to the moon-lighted paths of the churchyard, and had more than once wished she could peep in unseen on the party.

It was not long afterwards that Mildred was induced to partake of Dr. Heriot's hospitality.

It was the day before the Castlesteads Rush-bearing. Mildred was in the town with Olive and Polly, when, just as they were turning the corner by the King's Arms, a heavy shower came on ; and Dr. Heriot, who was entering his own door, beckoned to them to run across and take shelter.

Dr. Heriot's house stood in a secluded corner of the market-place, behind the King's Arms ; the bank was on the left-hand side, and from the front windows there was a good view of the market-place, the town pump, and butter market, and the quaint, old-fashioned shops.

The shops of Kirkby Stephen drove a brisk trade, in spite of the sleepy air that pervaded them, and the curious intermixture of goods that they patronised.

The confectioner's was also a china shop, and there was a millinery room upstairs, while the last new music was only procurable at the tin shop.

Jams and groceries could be procured at the druggist's, while the fashionable milliner of the town was also the post-mistress. On certain days, the dull little butcher's shop, with its picturesque gable and over-hanging balcony, was guileless of anything but its chopping-blocks, and perhaps the half-carcase of a sheep ; beef was not always to be had for the asking, a fact which London house-keepers were slow to understand.

On Mondays the town wore a more thriving appearance ; huge waggons blocked up the market-place, stalls containing all sorts of wares occupied the central area, the country women sold chickens and eggs, and tempting rolls of fresh butter, the gentlemen farmers congregated round the King's Arms ; towards afternoon, horse-dealers tried their horses' paces up and down the steep high street, while the village curs made themselves conspicuous barking at their heels.

"I hope you will always make use of me in this way," said Dr. Heriot, as he shook Mildred's wet cloak, and ushered them into the hall ; "the rain has damped you already, but I hope it is only a passing shower for the little rush-bearers' sakes to-morrow."

"The barometer points to fair," observed Polly, anxiously.

“Yes, and this shower will do all the good in the world, lay the dust, and render your long drive enjoyable. Ah! Miss Lambert, you have found out why Olive honours me by so many visits,” as Mildred glanced round the large handsome hall, fitted up by glass book-cases; and with its carpeted floor and round table, and brackets of blue dragon china looking thoroughly comfortable.

“This is my dining-room and consulting-room; my surgery is elsewhere,” continued Dr. Heriot. “My drawing-room is so little used, that I am afraid Marjory often forgets to draw up the blinds.” And he showed Mildred the low-ceiled pleasant rooms, well-furnished, and tastefully arranged; but the drawing-room having the bare disused air of a room that a woman’s footstep seldom enters. Mildred longed to droop the curtain into less stiff folds, and to fill the empty vases with flowers.

Polly spoke out her thought immediately afterwards.

“I mean to come in every morning on my way to school, and pull up the blinds, and fill that china bowl with roses. Marjory won’t mind anything I do.”

“Your labour will be wasted, Polly,” returned

her guardian, rather sadly. "No one but Mrs. Sadler, or Miss Ortolan, or perhaps Mrs. Northcote, ever sits on that yellow couch. Your roses would waste their sweetness on the desert air; no one would look at them, or smell them; but it is a kind thought, little one," with a gentle, approving smile.

"Which room was the scene of Polly's feast?" asked Mildred, curiously.

"Oh, the den—I mean the room I generally inhabit; it is snug, and opens into the conservatory; and I have grown to like it somehow. Now, Polly, you must make us some tea; but the question is, will you favour the yellow couch and the empty rose-bowls, Miss Lambert, or do you prefer the dining-room?"

"Dr. Heriot, what do you mean by treating Aunt Milly so stiffly? of course we shall have tea in the den, as usual." But he interrupted her by a brief whisper in her ear, which made her laugh and clap her hands. Evidently there was some delightful secret between them, for Polly's eyes sparkled as she stood holding his arm with both hands; and even Dr. Heriot's twinkled with amusement.

"Miss Lambert, Polly wants to know if you can

keep a secret? I don't think you look dangerous, so you shall be shown the mystery of the den."

"Does Olive know?" asked Mildred, looking at the girl as she sat hunching her shoulders, as usual, over a book.

"Yes, but she does not approve. Olive never approves of anything nice," returned Polly, saucily. "Let us go very quietly; he generally whistles so loud, that he never hears anything;" and as Polly softly opened the door, very clear, sweet whistling was distinctly audible.

There was a little glass-house beyond the cosy room they were entering; and there, amongst flowers and canaries, and gaily-striped awning, in his old blue cricketing coat, was Roy painting.

Dr. Heriot beckoned Mildred to come nearer, and she had ample leisure to admire the warm sunshiny tints of a small landscape, to which he was putting finishing touches, until the melodious whistling ceased, and an exclamation of delight from Polly made him turn round.

"Aunt Milly, this is too bad; you have stolen a march on me;" and Roy's fair face was suffused for a moment. "I owe Dr. John a grudge for this," threatening him with his palette and brush.

Polly could not resist the pleasure of showing

her aunt the mysteries of Bluebeard's den. "When you miss your boy, you will know where to find him in future, Miss Lambert."

"Roy, dear, you must not be vexed. I had no idea Polly's secret had anything to do with you," said Mildred, gently. "Dr. Heriot is very good to allow you to make use of this pleasant studio."

Roy's brow cleared like magic.

"I am glad you think so. I was only afraid you would talk nonsense, as Livy does, about waste of time, and hiding talents under a bushel. Holloa, Livy, I did not know you were there; no offence intended; but you do talk an awful quantity of rubbish sometimes."

"I only said it was a pity you did not tell papa about it; your being an artist, I mean," answered Olive, mildly; but Roy interrupted her impatiently.

"You know I cannot bear disappointing him, but of course it has to be told. Aunt Milly, do you think my father would ask Dad Fabian down to see Polly? I should so like to have a talk with him. You see, Dr. John is only an amateur; he cannot tell me if I am ever likely to be an artist," finished Roy, a little despondingly.

"I am not much of a critic, but I like your

picture, Roy ; it looks so fresh and sunny. I could almost feel as though I were sitting down on that mossy bank ; and that little girl in her red cloak is charming."

Roy coloured bashfully over the praise.

" I tell him that with his few advantages he does wonders ; he has only picked up desultory lessons here and there," observed Dr. Heriot.

" That old fellow at Sedbergh taught me to grind colours, and I fell in with an artist at York once. I don't mind you knowing a bit, Aunt Milly ; only"—lowering his voice so as not to be heard by the others—" I want to get an opinion worth having, and be sure I am not only the dabbler Dick thinks me, before I bother the Padre about it; but I shall do no good at anything else, let Dick say what he will ;" a touch of defiance and hopelessness in his voice, very different from his ordinary saucy manners. Evidently Roy was in earnest for once in his life.

" You are quite right, Roy ; it is the most beautiful life in the world," broke in Polly, enthusiastically. " It is nobler to try at that and fail, than to be the most successful lawyer in the world."

" The gentlemen of the robe would thank you,

Polly. Do you know, I have a great respect for a learned barrister."

"All that Polly knows about them is, they wear a wig and carry a blue bag," observed Roy, with one of his odd chuckles.

"What a Bohemian you are, Polly."

"I like what is best and brightest and most lovable in life," returned Polly, undauntedly. "I think you are an artist by nature, because you care so much for beautiful scenery, and are so quick to see different shades and tints of colouring. Dad Fabian is older, and grander, far—but you talk a little like him, Roy; your words have the same ring, somehow."

"Polly is a devout believer in Roy's capabilities," observed Dr. Heriot, half-seriously and half-laughing. "You are fortunate, Roy, to have inspired so much faith already; it must warm up your landscapes and brighten your horizons for you. After all, there is nothing like sympathy in this world," with a scarcely audible sigh.

"Dr. Heriot, tea is ready," broke in Polly, with one of her quick transitions from enthusiasm to matter-of-fact reality, as she moved as though by right to her place at the head of the table, and looked as though she expected her guardian to

seat himself as usual beside her ; while Dr. Heriot drew up a comfortable rocking-chair for Mildred. Certainly the den presented a cheerful aspect to-night ; the little glass-house, as Dr. Heriot generally termed it, with its easel and flowers, and its pleasant glimpse of the narrow garden and blue hills behind, looked picturesque in the afternoon light ; the rain had ceased, the canaries burst into loud song, there was a delicious fragrance of verbena and heliotrope ; Roy stretched his lazy length on the little red couch, his fair head in marked contrast with Mildred's brown coils ; a great crimson-hearted rose lay beside her plate.

Dr. Heriot's den certainly lacked no visible comfort ; there were easy-chairs for lounging, small book-cases filled with favourite books, a writing-table, and a marble stand, with a silver reading-lamp, that gave the softest possible light ; one or two choice prints enlivened the walls. Dr. Heriot evidently kept up a luxurious bachelor's life, for the table was covered with good things ; and Mildred ventured to praise the excellent Westmorland cakes.

“ Marjory makes better girdle-cakes than Nan, observed Polly. “ Do you know what my guardian calls them, Aunt Milly ? ”

" You should allow Miss Lambert to finish hers first," remonstrated Dr. Heriot.

" He calls them 'sudden deaths.' "

" Miss Lambert is looking quite pale, and laying down hers. I must help myself to some to reassure her ; " and Dr. Heriot suited his action to his words. " I perfectly scandalise Marjory by telling her they are very unwholesome, but she only says, ' Hod tongue o' ye, doctor ; t' kyuks are au weel enuff ; en'll hurt nin o' ye, if y'll tak 'em i' moderation.' "

" I think Marjory is much of a muchness with Nan in point of obstinacy."

" Nan's habits bewilder me," observed Mildred. " She eats so little fresh meat, as she calls it ; and whatever time I go into the kitchen, she seems perpetually at tea."

" Ay, four o'clock tea is the great meal of the day ; the servants certainly care very little for meat here. I am often surprised, when I go into the cottages, to see the number of cakes just freshly baked ; it is the most tempting meal they have. The girdle-cakes, and the little black tea-pot on the hob, and not unfrequently a great pile of brown toast, have often struck me as so appetising after a cold, wet ride, that I have often

shared a bit and a sup with them. Have you ever heard of Kendal wigs, Miss Lambert?"

Mildred shook her head.

"They are very favourite cakes. Many a farmer's wife on a market-day thinks her purchases incomplete without bringing home a goodly quantity of wigs. I am rather fond of them myself. All my oat-bread, or havre-bread as they call it, is sent me by an old patient who lives at Kendal. Do you know there is a quaint proverb, very much used here, 'As crafty as a Kendal fox'?"

"What is the origin of that?" asked Mildred, much amused.

"Well, it is doubtful. It may owe its origin to some sly old Reynard who in days long since 'escaped the hunter many times and oft;' or it might possibly originate in some family of the name of Fox living at Kendal, and noted for their business habits and prudence. There are two proverbs peculiar to this country."

"You mean the Pendragon one," observed Roy.

"Yes."

"Let Uter Pendragon do what he can,
Eden will run where Eden ran."

"You look mystified, Miss Lambert; but at Pendragon Castle in Mallerstang there may still be

seen traces of an attempt to turn the waters of Eden from their natural and wonted channel, and cause them to flow round the castle and fill the moat.”

“ How curious ! ”

“ Proverbs have been rightly defined ‘as the wisdom of the many and the wit of one.’ In one particular I believe this saying has a deep truth hidden in it. One who has studied the Westmorland character, says that its meaning is, that the people living on the banks of the Eden are as firm and persevering in their own way as the river itself; and that when they have once made up their minds as to what is their duty, all attempts to turn them aside from walking in the right way and doing their duty are equally futile.”

“ Hurrah for the Edenites ! ” exclaimed Roy, enthusiastically. “ I don’t believe there is a county in England to beat Westmorland.”

“ I must tell you what a quaint old writer says of it. ‘Here is cold comfort from nature,’ he writes, ‘but somewhat of warmth from industry: that the land is barren is God’s good pleasure; the people painful (*i. e.* painstaking), their praise.’ But I am afraid I must not enlighten your minds any more on proverbial philosophy, as it is time for

me to set off on my evening round. A doctor can use scant ceremony, Miss Lambert."

"It is time you dismissed us," returned Mildred, rising; "we have trespassed too long on your time already;" but, in spite of her efforts, she failed to collect her party. Only Olive accompanied her home. Roy returned to his painting and whistling, and Polly stayed behind to water the flowers and keep him company.

The next day proved fine and cloudless, and at the appointed time the old vicarage wagonette started off, with its bevy of boys and girls, with Mildred to act as *chaperone*.

Mildred was loath to leave her brother alone for so long a day, but Dr. Heriot promised to look in on him, and bring her a report in the afternoon.

The drive to Castlesteads was a long one, but Roy was in one of his absurd moods, and Polly and he kept up a lively exchange of *repartee* and jest, which amused the rest of the party. On their way they passed Musgrave, the church and vicarage lying pleasantly in the green meadows, on the very banks of the Eden; but Roy snorted contemptuously over Mildred's admiring exclamation—

"It looks very pretty from this distance, and would make a tolerable picture; and I don't deny

the walk by the river-bank is pleasant enough in summer-time, but you would be sorry to live there all the year round, Aunt Milly."

"Is the vicarage so comfortless, then?"

"Vicarage! It is little better than a cottage. It is positively bare, and mean, miserable little wainscoted rooms looking on a garden full of currant-bushes and London-pride. In winter the river floods the meadows, and comes up to the sitting-room window; just a place for rheumatism and agues and low fevers. I wonder Mr. Wigram can endure it!"

"There are the Northcotes overtaking us, Cardie," interrupted Chriss, eagerly; "give the browns a touch-up, I don't want them to pass us."

Richard did as he was requested, and the browns evidently resenting the liberty, there was soon a good distance between the two wagonettes; and shortly afterwards the pretty little village of Castlesteads came in sight, with its beeches and white cottages and tall May-pole,

"There is no time to be lost, Cardie. I can hear the band already. We must make straight for the park."

"We had better get down and walk, then, while George sees to the horses, or we shall lose the

procession. Come, Aunt Milly, we are a little late, I am afraid ; and we must introduce you to Mrs. Chesterton of the Hall in due form."

Mildred obeyed, and the little party hurried along the road, where knots of gaily-dressed people were already stationed to catch the first glimpse of the rush-bearers. The park gates were wide open, and a group of ladies, with a tolerable sprinkling of gentlemen, were gathered under the shady trees.

Mr. Delaware came striding across the grass in his cassock, with his college cap in his hand.

" You are only just in time," he observed, shaking hands cordially with Mildred ; " the children are turning the corner by the schools. I must go and meet them. Susie, will you introduce Miss Lambert to these ladies ? "

Mrs. Chesterton of the Hall was a large, placid-looking woman, with a motherly, benevolent face ; she was talking to a younger lady, in very fashionable attire, whom Mrs. Delaware whispered was Mrs. de Courcy, of the Grange : her husband, Major de Courcy, was at a little distance, with Mr. Chesterton and the Trelawneys.

Mildred had just time to bow to Ethel, when the loud, inspiriting blare of brazen instruments was

heard outside the park-gates. There was a burst of joyous music, and a faint sound of cheering, and then came the procession of children, with their white frocks and triumphant crowns.

The real garland used for the rush-bearing is of the shape of the old coronation crowns, and was formerly so large that it was borne by each child on a cushion ; and even at the present time it was too weighty an ornament to be worn with comfort.

One little maiden had recourse to her mother's support, and many a little hand went up to steady the uneasy diadem.

Mildred, who had never seen such a sight, was struck with the beauty and variety of the crowns. Some were of brilliant scarlet and white, such as covered May Chesterton's fair curls ; others were of softer violet. One was of beautifully-shaded roses ; and another and humbler one of heliotrope and large-eyed pansies. Even the cottage garlands were woven with taste and fancy. One of the poorest children, gleaning in lanes and fields, had formed her crown wholly of buttercups and ox-eyed daisies, and wore it proudly.

A lame boy, who had joined the procession, carried his garland in the shape of a large cross, which he held aloft. Mildred watched the bright

colours of moving flowers through the trees, and listened to the music half-dreamily, until Richard touched her arms.

“Every one is following the procession. You will lose the prettiest part of the whole, if you stand here, Aunt Milly; the children always have a dance before they go into church.” And so saying, he piloted her through the green park in the direction of the crowd.

By and by, they came to a little strip of lawn, pleasantly shaded by trees, and here they found the rush-bearers drawn up in line, with the crowns at their feet; the sun was shining, the butterflies flitted over the children’s heads, the music struck up gaily, the garlands lay in purple and crimson splashes of colour on the green sward.

“Wouldn’t it make a famous picture?” whispered Roy, eagerly. “I should like to paint it, and send it to the Royal Academy—‘The Westmorland Rush-bearing.’ Doesn’t May look a perfect fairy in her white dress, with her curls falling over her neck? That rogue of a Claude has chosen her for his partner. There, they are going to have lemonade and cake, and then they will ‘trip on the light, fantastic toe,’ till the church bells ring;” but Mildred was too much absorbed

to answer. The play of light and shadow, the shifting colours, the children's innocent faces and joyous laughter, the gaping rustics on the outside of the circle, charmed and interested her. She was sorry when the picture was broken up, and Mr. Delaware and the other clergy formed the children into an orderly procession again.

Mildred and Richard were the last to enter the church, but Miss Trelawny made room for them beside her. The pretty little church was densely crowded, and there was quite an inspiring array of clergy and choristers when the processional hymn was sung. Mr. Delaware gave an appropriate and very eloquent address, and during a pause in the service the churchwardens collected the garlands from the children, which were placed by the officiating priest and the assistant clergy on the altar-steps, or on the sloping sills of the chancel windows, or even on the floor of the sanctuary itself, the sunshine lighting up with vivid hues the many-coloured crowns.

These were left until the following day, when they were placed on a frame made for the purpose at the other end of the church, and there they hung until the next rush-bearing day ; the brown drooping leaves and faded flowers bearing solemn witness of the mutability and decay of all earthly things.

But as Mildred looked at the altar-steps, crowded with the fragrant and innocent offerings of the children, so solemnly blessed and accepted, and heard the fresh young voices lifted up in the crowning hymn of praise, there came to her remembrance some lines she had heard sung in an old city church, when the broidered bags, full of rich offerings, had been laid on the altar:—

“ Holy offerings rich and rare,
Offerings of praise and prayer,
Purer life and purpose high,
Claspèd hands and lifted eye,
Lowly acts of adoration
To the God of our salvation.
On His altar laid we leave them,
Christ present them! God receive them!

CHAPTER XI.

AN AFTERNOON IN CASTLESTEADS.

“The fields were all i’ vapour veil’d
Till, while the warm, breet rays assail’d,
Up fied the leet, grey mist.
The flowers expanded one by one,
As fast as the refreshing sun
Their dewv faces kiss’d.

* * * * *
And pleasure danced i’ mony an e’e
An’ mony a heart, wi’ mirth and glee
Thus flutter’d and excited—
An’ this was t’ cause, ye’ll understand
Some friends a grand picnic had plann’d,
An’ they had been invited.”

Tom Twisleton’s Poems in the Craven dialect.

It had been arranged that Mildred should form one of the luncheon-party at the vicarage, and that Richard should accompany her, while the rest of the young people were regaled at the Hall, where pretty May Chesterton held a sort of court.

The pleasant old vicarage was soon crowded with gaily-dressed guests—amongst them Mr. Trelawny and his daughter, and the Heaths of Brough.

Mildred, who had a predilection for old houses, found the vicarage much to her taste; she liked the quaint dimly-lighted rooms, with their deep embrasures, forming small inner rooms—while every window looked on the trim lawn and churchyard.

At luncheon she found herself under Mr. Delaware's special supervision, and soon had abundant opportunity of admiring the straightforward common sense and far-seeing views that had gained him universal esteem; he was evidently no mean scholar, but what struck Mildred was the simplicity and reticence that veiled his vast knowledge and made him an appreciative listener. Miss Trelawny, who was seated at his right-hand, monopolized the greater share of his attentions, and Mildred fancied that her *naïveté* and freshness were highly attractive, as every now and then an amused smile crossed his face.

Mrs. Delaware bloomed at them from the end of the table. She was rather more quietly dressed and looked prettier than ever, but Mildred noticed that the uneasy look, of which Richard had spoken, crossed her husband's face, as her voice, by no means gently modulated, reached his ears;

evidently he had a vexed sort of affection for the happy dimpling creature, who offended all his pet prejudices, wounded his too sensitive refinement, and disturbed the established *régime* of his scholarly life.

Susie's creams and roses were unimpeachable and her voice had the clear freshness of a lark, but dearly as he might love her, she could hardly be a companion to her husband in his higher moods—the keynote of sympathy must be wanting between this strangely-assorted couple, Mildred thought, and she wondered if any vague regrets for that youthful romance of his marred the possible harmonies of the present.

Would not a richly-cultivated mind like Ethel Trelawny's, for example, with strong original bias and all kinds of motiveless asceticism, have accorded better with his notions of womanly perfection, the classic features and low-pitched voice gaining by contrast with Susie's loud tuneful key and waste of bloom?

By an odd coincidence Mildred found herself alone with Mrs. Delaware after luncheon; the other ladies had already gone over to the park with the vicar, but his wife, who had been detained by some unavoidable business, had asked Mildred to wait for her.

Presently she appeared flushed and radiant.

“It is so good of you to wait, Miss Lambert; Stephen is so particular, and I was afraid things might go wrong as they did last year; I suppose he has gone on with the others.”

“Yes.”

“And Miss Trelawny?”

“I believe so.”

Mrs. Delaware’s bright face fell a little.

“Miss Trelawny is a rare talker, at least Stephen says so; but I never understand whether she is in fun or earnest; she must be clever, though, or Stephen would not say so much in her praise.”

“I think she amuses him.”

“Stephen does not care for amusement, he is always so terribly in earnest. Sometimes they talk for hours, till my head quite aches with listening to them. Do you think women ought to be so clever, Miss Lambert?” continued Susie, a little wistfully; and Mildred thought what a sweet face she had, and wondered less over Mr. Delaware’s choice—after all, blue eyes, when they are clear and loving, have a potent charm of their own.

“I do not know that Miss Trelawny is so very clever,” she returned; “she is original, but not

quite restful ; I could understand that she would tire most men."

"But not men like my Stephen," betraying in her simplicity some hidden irritation.

"Possibly not for an hour or two, only by continuance. The cleverest man I ever knew," continued Mildred artfully, "married a woman without an idea beyond housekeeping ; he was an astronomer, and she used to sit working beside him, far into the night, while he carried on his abstruse calculations ; he was a handsome man, and she was quite ordinary-looking, but they were the happiest couple I ever knew."

"Maybe she loved him dearly," returned Susie simply, but Mildred saw a glittering drop or two on her long eyelashes ; and just then they reached the park-gates, where they found Mr. Delaware waiting for them.

The park now presented a gay aspect, the sun shone on the old Hall and its trimly-kept gardens, its parterres blazing with scarlet geraniums, and verbenas, and heliotropes, and its shady winding walks full of happy groups.

On the lawn before the Hall the band was playing and rustic couples were already arranging themselves for the dance, tea was brewing in the

great white tent, with its long tables groaning with good cheer, children were playing amongst the trees ; in the meadow below the sports were held—the hound trail, pole-leaping, long-leaping, trotting-matches and wrestling filling up the afternoon.

Mildred was watching the dancers when she heard herself accosted by name ; there was no mistaking those crisp tones, they could belong to no other than Ethel Trelawny.

Miss Trelawny was looking remarkably well to-day, her cheeks had a soft bloom, and the rippling dark-brown hair strayed most becomingly from under the little white bonnet ; she looked brighter, happier, more animated.

“I thought you were busy in the tent, Miss Trelawny.”

Ethel laughed.

“I gave up my place to Mrs. Cooper ; it is too much to expect any one to remain in that stifling place four mortal hours ; just fancy, Miss Lambert, tea commences at 2 P.M. and goes on till 6.”

“I pity the tea-makers ; Mrs Delaware is one of course.”

“She is far from cool, but perfectly happy. Mrs. Delaware’s table is always crowded, mine

was so empty that I gave it up to Mrs. Cooper in disgust. Mr. Delaware will give me a scolding for deserting my post, but I dare say I shall survive it. How cool it is under these trees ; shall we walk a little ? ”

“ If you like ; but I enjoy watching those dancers.”

“ Distance will lend enchantment to the view—there is no poetry of movement there ; ” pointing a little disdainfully to a clumsy bumpkin who was violently impelling a full-blown rustic beauty through the mazes of a waltz.

“ What is lost in grace is made up in heartiness,” returned Mildred, bent on defending her favourite pastime. “ Look how lightly and well that girl in the lilac muslin is dancing, she would hardly disgrace a ball-room.”

“ She looks very happy,” returned Ethel, a little enviously ; “ she is one of Mr. Delaware’s favourite scholars, and I think she is engaged to that young farmer with whom she is dancing ; by the bye, have you seen Dr. Heriot ? ”

“ No. I did not know he was here.”

“ He was in the tent just now looking for you. He said he had promised to report himself as soon as he arrived. He found fault with the cup of tea

I gave him, and then he and Richard went off together."

Mildred smiled; she thought she knew the reason why Miss Trelawny looked so animated. She knew Dr. Heriot was a great favourite up at Kirkleatham, in spite of the many battles that were waged between him and Ethel; somehow she felt glad herself that Dr. Heriot had come.

Following Miss Trelawny's lead, they had crossed the park and the pleasure garden, and were now in a little grove skirting the fields, which led to a lonely summer-house, set in the heart of the green meadows, with an enchanting view of the blue hills beyond.

"What a lovely spot," observed Mildred.

"Here would my hermit spirit dwell apart," laughed Ethel. "What a sense of freedom those wide hills give one. I am glad you like it," she continued, more simply. "I brought you here because I saw you cared for these sort of things."

"Most people care for a beautiful prospect."

"Yes; but theirs is mere surface admiration—yours goes deeper. Do you know, Miss Lambert, I was wondering all luncheon time why you always look so restful and contented?"

“Perhaps because I am so,” returned Mildred, smiling.

“Yes, but you have known trouble; your face says so plainly; there are lines that have no business to be there; in some things you are older than your age.”

“You are a keen observer, Miss Trelawny.”

“Do not answer me like that,” she returned, a little hurt; “you are so earnest yourself that you ought to allow for earnestness in others. I knew directly I heard your voice that I should like you; does my frankness displease you?” turning on her abruptly.

“On the contrary, it pleases me!” replied Mildred, but she blushed a little under the scrutiny of this strange girl.

“You are undemonstrative, so am I to most people; but directly I saw your face and heard you speak I knew yours was a true nature, and I was anxious to win you for my friend; you do not know how sadly I want one,” she continued, her voice trembling a little. “One cannot live without sympathy.”

“It is not meant that we should do so,” returned Mildred softly.

“I believe mine to be an almost isolated case,”

returned Ethel. "No mother, no——" she checked herself, turned pale and hurried on, "with only a childlike memory of what brother-love really is, and a faint-off remembrance of a little white wasted face resting on a pillow strewn with lilies. I was very young then, but I remember how I cried when they told me my baby-sister was an angel in heaven."

"How old were you when your brothers died?" asked Mildred, gently. Ethel's animation had died away, and a look of deep sadness now crossed her face.

"I was only ten, Rupert was twelve, and Sidney fourteen; such fine manly boys, Sid. especially, and so good to me. Mamma never got over their death; and then I lost her; it seems so lonely their leaving me behind. Sometimes I wonder for what purpose I am left, and if I have much to suffer before I am allowed to join them?" and Ethel's eyes grew fixed and dreamy, till Mildred's sympathetic voice roused her.

"I should think nothing can replace a brother. When I was young I used to wish I were one of a large family. I remember envying a girl who told me she had seven sisters."

Ethel looked up with a melancholy smile.

"I wonder what it would be like to have a

sister? I mean if Ella had lived—she would be sixteen now. I used to have all sorts of strange fancies about her when I was a child. Mamma once read me Longfellow's poem of *Resignation*, and it made a great impression on me. You remember the words, Miss Lambert?" and Ethel repeated in her fresh sweet voice—

“‘Not as a child shall we again behold her,
For when with raptures wild,
In our embraces we again enfold her,
She will not be a child.

‘But a fair maiden in her Father’s mansion,
Clothed with celestial grace,
And beautiful with all the soul’s expansion
Shall we behold her face.’

That image of progressive beatitude and expanding youth seized strongly upon my childish imagination.” Mildred’s smile was a sufficient answer, and Ethel went on in the same dreamy tone, “After a time the little dead face became less distinct, and in its place I became conscious of a strange feeling, of a new sort of sister-love. I thought of Ella growing up in heaven, not learning the painful lessons I was so wearily learning here, but schooled by angels in the nobler mysteries of love; and so strong was this belief, that when I was naughty or

had given way to temper, I would cry myself to sleep, thinking that Ella would be disappointed in me, and often I did not dare look up at the stars for fear her eyes should be sorrowfully looking down on me. You will think me a fanciful visionary, Miss Lambert, but this childish thought has been my safeguard in many an hour of temptation."

"I would all our fancies were as pure. You need not fear that I should laugh at you as visionary, my dear Miss Trelawny; after all you may have laid your grasp on a great truth—there can be nothing undeveloped and imperfect in heaven, and infancy is necessarily imperfect."

"I never sympathised with the crude fancies of the old masters," returned Miss Trelawny; "the winged heads of their bodiless cherubs are as unsatisfactory and impalpable as Homer's flitting shades and shivering ghosts; but your last speech has chilled me somehow."

Mildred looked up in surprise; but Ethel's smile reassured her.

"No one but my father ever calls me Ethel—to the world I am Miss Trelawny, even Olive and Chriss are ceremonious, and latterly Mr. Lambert has dropped the old familiar term; somehow it adds to one's feeling of loneliness."

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“Do you mean that you wish me to drop such ceremony?” returned Mildred, laughing a little nervously. “Ethel! it is a quaint name, hardly musical, and with a suspicion of a lisp, but full of character; it suits you somehow.”

“Then you will use it,” exclaimed Ethel impulsively. “We are strangers, and yet I have talked to you this afternoon as I have never done to any one before.”

“There you pay me a compliment.”

“You have such a motherly way with you, Mildred—Miss Lambert, I mean.”

Mildred blushed, “Please do not correct yourself.”

“What! I may call you Mildred? how nice that will be; I shall feel as though you are some wise elder sister, you have got such tender old-fashioned ways, and yet they suit you somehow. I like you better, I think, because there seems nothing young about you.”

Ethel’s speech gave Mildred a little pang—unselfish and free from vanity as her nature was, she was still only a woman, and regret for her passing youth shadowed her brightness for a moment. Until her mother’s death she had never given it a thought. Why did Ethel’s fresh beauty and

glorious young vitality raise the faint wish, now heard for the first time, that she were more like the youthful and fairer Mildred of long ago? but even before Ethel had finished speaking, the unworthy thought was banished.

“I believe a wearing and long-continued trouble ages more than years; women have no right to grow sober before thirty, I know. Some lighter natures go haymaking between the tombs,” she went on quaintly, and as Ethel looked up astonished at the strange simile—“I have borrowed my metaphor from a homely circumstance, but as I sat working in the cool lobby yesterday they were making hay in the sunny churchyard, and somehow the idea seemed incongruous—the idea of gleaning sweetness and nourishment from decay. But does it not strike you we are becoming very philosophical—what are the little rush-bearers doing now I wonder?”

“After all, your human sympathies are less exclusive than mine,” returned her companion, regretfully. “I like this cool retreat better than the crowded park; but we are not to be left any longer in peace,” she continued, with a slight access of colour, “there are Dr. Heriot and Richard bearing down on us.” Mildred was not sorry to be

disturbed, as she thought it was high time to look after Olive and Chriss, an intention that Dr. Heriot instantly negatived by placing himself at her side.

“There is not the slightest necessity, they are under Mrs. Chesterton’s wing,” he remarked coolly; “we have been searching the park and grounds fruitlessly for an hour, till Richard hit on this spot; the hiding-place is worthy of Miss Trelawny.”

“You mean it is romantic enough; your words have a double edge, Dr. Heriot.”

“Pax,” he returned, laughingly, “it is too hot to renew the skirmish we carried on in the tent. I have brought you a favourable report of your brother, Miss Lambert; Mr. Warden, an old college chum of his, had arrived unexpectedly, and he was showing him the church.”

One of Mildred’s sweet smiles flitted over her face.

“How good you are to take all this trouble for me, Dr. Heriot.”

Dr. Heriot gave her an inscrutable look in which drollery came uppermost.

“Are you given to weigh fractional kindnesses in your neighbour? Most people give gratitude in grains for whole ounces of avoirdupois weight; what a grateful soul yours is, Miss Lambert.”

"The moral being that Dr. Heriot dislikes thanks, Mildred."

Dr. Heriot gave a low exclamation of surprise, which evidently irritated Miss Trelawny. "It has come to that already, has it," he said to himself with an inward chuckle, but Mildred could make nothing of his look of satisfaction and Ethel's aggravated colour.

"Why don't you deliver us one of your favourite tirades against feminine caprice and impulse?" observed Miss Trelawny, in a piqued voice.

"When caprice and impulse take the form of wisdom," was the answer in a meaning tone, "Mentor's office of rebuke fails."

Ethel arched her eyebrows slightly, "Mentor approves then?"

"Can you doubt it?" in a more serious tone. "I feel we may still have hopes of you;" then turning to Mildred, with the play of fun still in his eyes, "Our aside baffles you, Miss Lambert. Miss Trelawny is good enough to style me her Mentor, which means that she has given me a right to laugh at her nonsense and talk sense to her sometimes."

"You are too bad," returned Ethel in a low voice, but she was evidently hurt by the raillery, gentle as it was.

“ Miss Trelawny forms such extravagant ideals of men and women, that no one but a moral Anak can possibly reach to her standard ; the rest of us have to stand tiptoe in the vain effort to raise ourselves.”

“ Dr. Heriot, how can you be so absurd ? ” laughed Mildred.

“ It must be very fatiguing to stand on tiptoe all one’s life ; perhaps we might feel a difficulty of breathing in your rarer atmosphere, Miss Trelawny —fancy one’s ideas being always in full dress, from morning to night. When you marry, do you always mean to dish up philosophy with your husband’s breakfast ? ”

The hot colour mounted to Ethel’s forehead.

“ I give you warning that he will yawn over it sometimes, and refresh himself by talking to his dogs ; even Bayard, that peerless knight, *sans peur* and *sans reproche*, could be a little sulky at times, you may depend on it ! ”

“ Bayard is not my hero now,” she returned, trying to pluck up a little spirit with which to answer him. “ I have decided lately in favour of Sir Philip Sidney, as my beau-ideal of an English gentleman.”

“ Rex and I chose him for our favourite ages

ago," observed Richard eagerly, who until now had remained silent.

"Yes," continued Ethel, enthusiastically, "that one act of unselfishness has invested him with the reverence of centuries; can you not fancy the awful temptation, Mildred—the death thirst under the scorching sun, the unendurable agony of untended wounds, the cup of cold water, just tasted and refused for the sake of the poor wretch lying beside him; one could lay down one's life for such a man as that!"

"Yes, it was a gentlemanly action," observed Dr. Heriot coolly; and as Ethel's face expressed resentment at the phrase, "have you ever thought how much is comprehended under the term gentleman? To me the word is fuller and more comprehensive than that of hero; your heroes are such noisy fellows; there is always a sound of the harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer about them; and they pass their life in fitting their attitudes to their pedestal."

"Dr. John is riding one of his favourite hobbies," observed Richard, in a low voice. "Never mind, he admires Sir Philip as much as we do!"

"True, Cardie; but though I do not deny the heroism of the act, I maintain that many a man in

his place would do the same thing. Have we no stories of heroism in our Crimean annals? Amongst the hideous details of the Indian mutiny were there no deeds that might match that of the dying soldier at Zutphen?"

"Perhaps so; but all the same I have a right to my own ideal."

A mocking smile swept over Dr. Heriot's face.

"Virtue in an Elizabethan ruff surpasses virtue clad in nineteenth century broadcloth and fustian. I suspect even in your favourite Sir Philip's case distance lends enchantment to the view; he wrote very sweetly on Arcadia, but who knows but a twinge of the gout may not have made him cross?"

"How you persist in misunderstanding me," returned Ethel, with a touch of feeling in her voice. "I suppose as usual I have brought this upon myself, but why will you believe that I am so hard to please? After all you are right; Bayard and Sir Philip Sidney are only typical characters of their day; there must be great men even in this generation."

"There are downright honest men, men who are not ashamed to confess to flaws and inconsistencies, and possible twinges of gout."

"There you spoil all," said Mildred, with an

amused look ; but Dr. Heriot's mischievous mood was not to be restrained.

“ One of these honest fellows with a tolerably tough will, and not an ounce of imagination in his whole composition—positively of the earth, earthy —will strike the right chord that is to bring Hermione from off her pedestal—don't frown, Miss Trelawny ; you may depend upon it those old Turks were right, and there is a fate in these things.”

Ethel curved her long neck superbly, and turned with a slightly contemptuous expression to Richard : her patience was exhausted.

“ I think my father will be wondering what has become of me ; will you take me to him ? ”

“ There they go, Ethel and her knight ; how little she knows that perhaps her fate is beside her ; they are too much of an age, but that lad has the will of half a dozen men.”

“ Why do you tease her so ? ” remonstrated Mildred. Dr. Heriot still retained his seat comfortably beside her. “ She is very girlish and romantic, but she hardly deserved such biting sarcasms.”

“ Was I sarcastic ? ” he asked, evidently surprised. “ Poor child ! I would not have hurt her

for the world. And these luxuriant fancies need pruning ; hers is a fine nature run to seed for want of care and proper nurture."

"I think she needs sympathy," returned gentle Mildred.

"Then she has sought it in the right quarter," with a look she could hardly misunderstand, "and where the supply is always equal to the demand, but I warn you she is somewhat of an egotist."

"Oh, no!" warmly. "I am sure Miss Trelawny is not selfish."

"That depends how you interpret the phrase. She would give you all her jewels without a sigh, but you must allow her to talk out all her fine feeling in return. After all, she is only like others of her sex."

"You are in one of your misanthropical moods."

"Men are not always feeling their own pulse and detailing their moral symptoms, depend upon it ; it is quite a feminine weakness, Miss Lambert. I think I know one woman tolerably free from the disease, at least outwardly ;" and as Mildred blushed under the keen, yet kindly look, Dr. Heriot somewhat abruptly changed the subject.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WELL-MEANING MISCHIEF-MAKER.

“And in that shadow I have pass’d along,
Feeling myself grow weak as it grew strong ;
Walking in doubt and searching for the way,
And often at a stand—as now to-day.

* * * *

Perplexities do throng upon my sight
Like scudding fogbanks, to obscure the light ;
Some new dilemma rises every day,
And I can only shut my eyes and pray.”—*Anon.*

MILDRED had been secretly reproaching herself for allowing Dr. Heriot’s pleasing conversation so completely to monopolise her, and even her healthy conscience felt a pang something like remorse when, half an hour later, they came upon Olive sitting alone on a tree-trunk, having evidently stolen apart from her companions to indulge unobserved in one of her usual reveries.

She was too much absorbed to notice them till addressed by name, and then, to Mildred’s surprise, she started, coloured from chin to brow, and, muttering some excuse, seemed only anxious to effect her escape.

"I hope you are not composing an Ode to Melancholy," observed Dr. Heriot, with one of his quizzical looks. "You look like a forsaken wood-nymph, or a disconsolate Chloe, or Jacques' sobbing deer, or any other uncomfortable image of loneliness. What an unsociable creature you are, Olive."

"Why are you not with Chrissy and the Chestertons? I hope we have not all neglected you," interposed Mildred in her soft voice, for she saw that Olive shrank from Dr. Heriot's good-humoured raillery. "Are you tired, dear? Roy has not ordered the carriage for another hour, I am afraid."

"No, I am not tired; I was only thinking. I will find Chriss," returned Olive, stammering and blushing still more under her aunt's affectionate scrutiny. "Don't come with me, please, Aunt Milly. I like being alone." And before Mildred could answer, she had disappeared down a little side-walk, and was now lost to sight.

Dr. Heriot laughed at Mildred's discomposed look.

"You remind me of the hen when she hatched the duckling and found it taking kindly to the unknown element. You must get used to Olive's odd ways; she is decidedly original. I should not

wonder if we disturbed her in the first volume of some wonderful scheme-book, where all the heroines are martyrs and the hero is a full-length portrait of Richard. I warn you all her *dénouements* will be disastrous. Olive does not believe in happiness for herself or other people."

"How hard you are on her!" returned Mildred, finding it impossible to restrain a smile; but in reality she felt a little anxious. Olive had seemed more than usually absorbed during the last few days; there was a concentrated gravity in her manner that had struck Mildred more than once, but all questioning had been in vain. "I am not unhappy—at least, not more than usual. I am only thinking out some troublesome thoughts," she had said when Mildred had pressed her the previous night. "No, you cannot do anything for me, Aunt Milly. I only want to help myself and other people to do right." And Mildred, who was secretly weary of this endless scrupulosity, and imagined it was only a fresh attack of Olive's troublesome conscience, was fain to rest content with the answer, though she reproached herself not a little afterwards for a selfish evasion of a manifest duty.

The remainder of the day passed over pleasantly

enough. Dr. Heriot had contrived to make his peace with Miss Trelawny, for she had regained her old serenity of manner when Mildred saw her again. She came just as they were starting, to beg that Mildred would spend a long day at Kirkleatham House.

“Papa is going over to Appleby, to the Sessions Court, and I shall be alone all day to-morrow. Do come, Mildred,” she pleaded. “You do not know what a treat it will be to me.” And though Mildred hesitated, her objections were all overruled by Richard, who insisted that nobody wanted her, and that a holiday would do her good.

Richard's arguments prevailed, and Mildred thoroughly enjoyed her holiday. Some hours of unrestrained intercourse only convinced her that Ethel Trelawny's faults lay on the surface, and were the result of a defective education and disadvantageous circumstances, while the real nobility of her character revealed itself in every thought and word. She had laid aside the slight hauteur and extravagance that marred simplicity and provoked the just censure of men like Dr. Heriot; lesser natures she delighted to baffle by an eccentricity that was often ill-timed and out of place, but to-day the stilts, as Dr. Heriot termed them, were out

of sight. Mildred's sincerity touched the right keynote, her brief captiousness vanished, unconsciously she showed the true side of her character. Gentle, though unsatisfied ; childishly eager, and with a child's purity of purpose ; full of lofty aims, unpractical, waiting breathless for mere visionary happiness for which she knew no name ; sweet, though subtle egotist, and yet tender-hearted and womanly ;—no wonder Ethel Trelawny was a fascinating study to Mildred that long summer's day.

Mildred listened with unwearied sympathy while Ethel dwelt pathetically on her lonely and purposeless life, with its jarring gaieties and absence of congenial fellowship.

“Papa is dreadfully methodical and business-like. He always finds fault with me because I am so unpractical, and will never let me help him, or talk about what interests him ; and then he cares for politics. He was so disappointed because he failed in the last election. His great ambition is to be a member of parliament. I know they got him to contest the Kendal borough ; but he had no chance, though he spent I am afraid to say how much money. The present member was too popular, and was returned by a large majority. He

was very angry because I did not sympathise with him in his disappointment; but how could I, knowing it was for the honour of the position that he wanted it, and not for the highest motives? And then the bribery and corruption were so sickening."

"I do not think we ought to impute any but the highest motives until we know to the contrary," returned Mildred, mildly.

Ethel coloured. "You think me disloyal; but papa knows my sentiments well; we shall never agree on these questions—never. I fancy men in general take a far less high standard than women."

"You are wrong there," returned practical Mildred, firing up at this sweeping assertion, which had a taint of heresy in her ears. "Because men live instead of talk their opinions, you mis-judge them. Do you think the single eye and the steady aim is not a necessary adjunct of all real manhood? Look at my brother, look at Dr. Heriot, for example; they are no mere worldlings, leading purposeless existences, they are both hard workers and deep thinkers."

"We will leave Dr. Heriot out of the question; I see he has begun to be perfection in your eyes, Mildred. Nay,"—and Mildred drew herself up with a little dignity and looked annoyed—"I

meant nothing but the most platonic admiration, which I assure you he reciprocates in an equal degree. He thinks you a very superior person—so well-principled, so entirely unselfish ; he is always quoting you as an example, and——”

“I agree with you that we should leave personalities in the background,” returned Mildred, hastily, and taking herself to task for feeling aggrieved at Dr. Heriot calling her a superior person. The argument waxed languid at this point ; Ethel became a little lugubrious under Mildred’s reproof, and relapsed into pathetic egotism again, pouring out her longings for vocation, work, sympathy, and all the disconnected iota of female oratory worked up into enthusiasm.

“I want work, Mildred.”

“And yet you dream dreams and see visions.”

“Hush ! please let me finish. I do not mean make-believes, shifts to get through the day, fanciful labours befitting rank and station, but real work, that will fill one’s heart and life.”

“Yours is a hungry nature. I fear the demand would double the supply. You would go starved from the very place where we poor ordinary mortals would have a full meal.”

Ethel pouted. “I wish you would not borrow

metaphors from our tiresome Mentor. I declare, Mildred, your words have always more or less a flavour of Dr. Heriot's."

Mildred quietly took up her work. "You know how to reduce me to silence."

But Ethel playfully impeded the sewing by laying her crossed hands over it.

"Dr. Heriot's name seems an apple of discord between us, Mildred."

"You are so absurd about him."

"I am always provoked at hearing his opinions second-hand. I have less comfort in talking to him than to any one else; I always seem to be airing my own foolishness."

"At least, I am not accountable for that," returned Mildred, pointedly.

"No," returned Ethel, with her charming smile, which at once disarmed Mildred's prudery. "You wise people think and talk much alike; you are both so hard on mere visionaries. But I can bear it more patiently from you than from him."

"I cannot solve riddles," replied Mildred, in her old sensible manner. "It strikes me that you have fashioned Dr. Heriot into a sort of bugbear—*a bête noir* to frighten naughty prejudiced children; and yet he is truly gentle."

"It is the sort of gentleness that rebukes one more than sternness," returned Ethel in a low voice. "How odd it is, Mildred, when one feels compelled to show the worst side of oneself, to the very people, too, whom one most wishes to propitiate, or, at least—but my speech threatens to be as incoherent as Olive's."

"I know what you mean; it comes of thinking too much of a mere expression of opinion."

"Oh, no," she returned, with a quick blush; "it only comes from a rash impulse to dethrone Mentor altogether—the idea of moral leading-reins are so derogatory after childhood has passed."

"You must give me a hint if I begin to lecture in my turn. I shall forget sometimes you are not Olive or Chriss."

The soft, brilliant eyes filled suddenly with tears.

"I could find it in my heart to wish I were even Olive, whom you have a right to lecture. How nice it would be to belong to you really, Mildred; to have a real claim on your time and sympathy."

"All my friends have that," was the soft answer. "But how dark it is growing—the longest day must have an end, you see."

"That means—you are going," she returned, regretfully. "Mother Mildred is thinking of her

children. I shall come down and see you and them soon, and you must promise to find me some work."

Mildred shook her head. "It must not be my finding if it is to satisfy your exorbitant demands."

"We shall see; anyhow you have left me plenty to think about—you will leave a little bit of sunshine behind you in this dull, rambling house. Shall you go alone? Richard or Royal ought to have walked up to meet you."

"Richard half promised he would, but I do not mind a lonely walk." And Mildred nodded brightly as she turned out of the lodge-gates. She looked back once; the moon was rising, a star shone on the edge of a dark cloud, the air was sweet with the breath of honeysuckles and roses, a slight breeze stirred Ethel's white dress as she leaned against the heavy swing-gate, the sound of a horse's hoofs rang out from the distance, the next moment she had disappeared into the shrubbery, and Dr. Heriot walked his horse all the way to the town by the side of Mildred.

Mildred's day had refreshed and exhilarated her; congenial society was as new as it was delightful. "Somehow I think I feel younger instead of older," thought the quiet woman, as she turned up the

vicarage lane and entered the courtyard; "after all, it is sweet to be appreciated."

"Is that you, Aunt Milly? You look ghost-like in the gloaming."

"Naughty boy, how you startled me! Why did not you or Richard walk up to Kirkleatham House?"

"We could not," replied Roy, gravely. "My father wanted Richard, and I—I did not feel up to it. Go in, Aunt Milly; it is very damp and chilly out here to-night." And Roy resumed his former position of lounging against the trellis-work of the porch. There was a touch of despondency in the lad's voice and manner that struck Mildred, and she lingered for a moment in the porch.

"Are you not coming in too?"

"No, thank you, not at present," turning away his face.

"Is there anything the matter, Roy?"

"Yes—no. One must have a fit of the dumps sometimes; life is not all syrup of roses"—rather crossly for Roy.

"Poor old Royal—what's amiss, I wonder? There, I will not tease you," touching his shoulder caressingly, but with a half-sigh at the reticence of Betha's boys. "Where is Richard?"

“With my father—I thought I told you ;” then, mastering his irritability with an effort, “please don’t go to them, Aunt Milly, they are discussing something. Things are rather at sixes and sevens this evening, thanks to Livy’s interference ; she will tell you all about it. Good-night, Aunt Milly ;” and as though afraid of being farther questioned, Roy strode down the court, where Mildred long afterwards heard him kicking up the beck gravel, as a safe outlet and vent for pent-up irritability.

Mildred drew a long breath as she went upstairs. “I shall pay dearly for my pleasant holiday,” she thought. She could hear low voices in earnest talk as she passed the study, but as she stole noiselessly down the lobby no sound reached her from the girls’ room, and she half hoped Olive was asleep.

As she opened her own door, however, there was a slight sound as of a caught breath, and then a quick sob, and to her dismay she could just see in the faint light the line of crouching shoulders and a bent figure huddled up near the window that could belong to no other than Olive. It must be confessed that Mildred’s heart shrank for a moment from the weary task that lay before her ; but the

next instant genuine pity and compassion banished the unworthy thought.

“My poor child, what is this?”

“Oh, Aunt Milly,” with a sort of gasp, “I thought you would never come.”

“Never mind; I am here now. Wait a moment till I strike a light,” commenced Mildred, cheerfully; but Olive interrupted her with unusual fretfulness.

“Please don’t; I can talk so much better in the dark. I came in here because Chrissy was awake, and I could not bear her talk.”

“Very well, my dear, it shall be as you wish,” returned Mildred gently; and the soft warm hands closed over the girl’s chill, nervous fingers with comforting pressure. A strong restful nature like Mildred’s was the natural refuge of a timid despondent one such as Olive’s. The poor girl felt a sensation something like comfort as she groped her way a little nearer to her aunt, and felt the kind arm drawing her closer.

“Now tell me all about it, my dear.”

Olive began, but it was difficult for Mildred to follow the long rambling confession; with all her love for truth, Olive’s morbid sensitiveness tinged most things with exaggeration. Mildred hardly

knew if her timidity and incoherence were not jumbling facts and suppositions together with a great deal of intuitive wisdom and perception. There was a sad amount of guess-work and unreality, but after a few leading questions, and by dint of allowing Olive to tell her story in her own way, she contrived to get tolerably near the true state of the case.

It appeared that Olive had for a long time been seriously unhappy about her brothers. Truthful and uncompromising herself, there had seemed to her a want of integrity and a blamable lack of openness in their dealings with their father. With the best intentions, they were absolutely deceiving him by leaving him in such complete ignorance of their wishes and intentions. Royal especially was making shipwreck of his father's hopes concerning him, devoting most of his time and energies to a secret pursuit; while his careless preparation for his tutor was practical, if not actual, dishonesty.

“At least Cardie works hard enough,” interrupted Mildred at this point.

“Yes, because it will serve either purpose; but, Aunt Milly, he ought to tell papa how he dreads the idea of being ordained; it is not right; he is unfit for it; it is worse than wrong—absolute sacrilege;”

and Olive poured out tremblingly into her aunt's shocked ear that she knew Cardie had doubts, that he was unhappy about himself. No—no one had told her, but she knew it; she had watched him, and heard him talk, and she burst into tears as she told Mildred that once he absolutely sneered at something in his father's sermon which he declared obsolete, and not a matter of faith at all.

“But, my dear,” interrupted the elder woman, anxiously, “my brother ought to know. I—some one—must speak to Richard.”

“Oh, Aunt Milly, you will hear—it is I—who have done the mischief; but you told me there were no such things as conflicting duties; and what is the use of a conscience if it be not to guide and make us do unpleasant things?”

“You mean you spoke to Richard?”

“I have often tried to speak to him, but he was always angry, and muttered something about my interference; he could not bear me to read him so truly. I know it was all Mr. Macdonald. Papa had him to stay here for a month, and he did Cardie so much harm.”

“Who is he—I never heard of him?” And Olive explained, in her rambling way, that he was an old college friend of her father's and a very

clever barrister, and he had come to them to recruit after a long illness. According to her accounts, his was just the sort of character to attract a nature like Richard's. His brilliant and subtle reasoning, his long and interesting disquisitions on all manner of subjects, his sceptical hints, conveying the notion of danger, and yet never exactly touching on forbidden ground, though they involved a perilous breadth of views, all made him a very unsafe companion for Richard's clever, inquisitive mind. Olive guessed, rather than knew, that things were freely canvassed in those long country walks that would have shocked her father; though, to his credit be it said, Henry Macdonald had no idea of the mischievous seed he had scattered in the ardent soil of a young and undeveloped nature.

Mildred was very greatly dismayed too when she heard that Richard had read books against which he had been warned, and which must have further unsettled his views. "I think mamma guessed he had something on his mind, for she was always trying to make him talk to papa, and telling him papa could help him; but I heard him say to her once that he could not bear to disappoint him so, that he must have time, and battle through it alone. I know mamma could not endure Mr.

Macdonald ; and when papa wanted to have him again, she said, once quite decidedly, ‘No, she did not like him, and he was not good for Richard.’ I noticed papa seemed quite surprised and taken aback.”

“ Well, go on, my dear ; ” for Olive sighed afresh at this point as though it were difficult to proceed.

“ Of course you will think me wrong, Aunt Milly. I do myself now ; but if you knew how I thought about it, till my head ached and I was half stupid !—but I worked myself up to believe that I ought to speak to papa.”

“ Ah ! ” Mildred checked the exclamation that rose to her lips, fearing lest a weary argument should break the thread of Olive’s narrative, which now showed signs of flowing smoothly.

“ I half made up my mind to ask your advice, Aunt Milly, on the rush-bearing day, but you were tired, and Polly was with you, and——”

“ Have I ever been too tired to help you, Olive ? ” asked Mildred, reproachfully ; all the more that an uncomfortable sensation crossed her at the remembrance that she had noticed a wistful anxiety in Olive’s eyes the previous night, but had nevertheless dismissed her on the plea of weariness, feeling herself unequal to one of the girl’s endless

discussions. “ I am sorry—nay, heartily grieved—if I have ever repelled your confidence.”

“ Please don’t talk so, Aunt Milly ; of course it was my fault, but ” (timidly) “ I am afraid sometimes I shall tire even you ; ” and Mildred’s pangs of conscience were so intense that she dared not answer ; she knew too well that Olive had of late tired her, though she had no idea the girl’s sensitiveness had been wounded. A kind of impatience seized her as Olive talked on ; she felt the sort of revolt and want of realisation that borders the pity of one in perfect health walking for the first time through the wards of a hospital, and met on all sides by the spectacle of mutilated and suffering humanity.

“ How shall I ever deal with all these moods of mind ? ” she thought hopelessly, as she composed herself to listen.

“ So you spoke to your father, Olive ? Go on ; I will tell you afterwards what I think.”

There was a little sternness in the low tones, from which the girl shrank. Of course Aunt Milly thought her wrong and interfering. Well, she had been wrong, and she went on still more humbly :

“ I thought it was my duty ; it made me miserable to do it, because I knew Cardie would

be angry, though I never knew how angry ; but I got it into my head that I ought to help him, in spite of himself, and because Rex was so weak. You have no idea how weak and vacillating Rex is when it comes to disappointing people, Aunt Milly."

"Yes, I know ; go on," was all the answer Mildred vouchsafed to this.

"I brooded over it all St. Peter's day, and at night I could not sleep. I thought of that verse about cutting off the right hand and plucking out the right eye ; it seemed to me it lay between Cardie and speaking the truth, and that no pain ought to hinder me ; and I determined to speak to papa the first opportunity ; and it came to-day. Cardie and Rex were both out, and papa asked me to walk with him to Winton, and then he got tired, and we sat down half way on a fallen tree, and then I told him."

"About Richard's views ?"

"About everything. I began with Rex ; I told papa how his very sweetness and amiability made him weak in things ; he so hated disappointing people, that he could not bring himself to say what he wished ; and just now, after his illness and trouble, it seemed doubly hard to do it."

“And what did he say to that?”

“He looked grieved; yes, I am sure he was grieved. He does not believe that Roy knows his own mind, or will ever do much good as an artist; but all he said was, ‘I understand—my own boy—afraid of disappointing his father. Well, well, the lad knows best what will make him happy.’”

“And then you told him about Richard?”

“Yes,” catching her breath as though with a painful thought; “when I got to Cardie, somehow the words seemed to come of themselves, and it was such a relief telling papa all I thought. It has been such a burden all this time, for I am sure no one but mamma ever guessed how unhappy Cardie really was.”

“You, who know him so well, could inflict this mortification on him—no, I did not mean to say that, you have suffered enough, my child; but did it not occur to you that you were betraying a sacred confidence?”

“Confidence, Aunt Milly!”

“Yes, Olive; your deep insight into your brother’s character, and your very real affection for him, ought to have guarded you from this mistake, if you had read him so truly as to discover all this for yourself. You should not have imparted this

knowledge without warning, knowing how much it would wound that jealous reticence of his. If you had waited, doubtless Richard's good sense would have induced him at last to confide in his father."

"Not until it was too late—until he had worn himself out. He gets more jaded and weary every day, Aunt Milly."

Mildred shook her head.

"The golden rule holds good even here, 'To do unto others as we would they should do unto us.' How would you like Richard to retail your opinions and feelings, under the impression he owed you a duty?"

"Aunt Milly, indeed I thought I was acting for the best."

"I do not doubt it, my child; the love that guided you is clearer than the wisdom; but what did Arnold—what did your father say?"

"Oh, Aunt Milly, he looked almost heart-broken; he covered his face with his hands, and I think he was praying; and yet he seemed almost as though he were talking to mamma. I am sure he had forgotten I was there. I heard him say something about having been selfish in his great grief; that he must have neglected his boy, or

been hard and cruel to him, or he would never have so repelled his confidence. 'Betha's boy, her darling,' he kept saying to himself; 'my poor Cardie, my poor lad,' over and over again, till I spoke to him to rouse him; and then he said,—here Olive faltered,—“‘that I had been a good girl—a faithful little sister,—and that I must try and take her place, and remind them how good and loving she was.’ And then he broke down. Oh, Aunt Milly, it was so dreadful; and then I made him come back.”

“My poor brother! I knew he would take it to heart.”

“He said it was like a stab to him, for he had always been so proud of Cardie; and it was his special wish to devote his first-born to the service of the Church; and when I asked if he wished it now, he said, vehemently, ‘A half-hearted service, reluctantly made—God forbid a son of mine should do such wrong!’ and then he was silent for a long time; and just at the beginning of the town we met Rex, and papa whispered to me to leave them together.”

“My poor Olive, I can guess what a hard day you have had,” said Mildred, caressingly, as the girl paused in her recital.

"The hardest part was to come ;" and Olive shivered, as though suddenly chilled. "I was not prepared for Rex being so angry ; he is so seldom cross, but he said harder things to me than he has said in his life."

Mildred thought of the harmless kicks on the beck gravel, and the irritability in the porch, and could not forbear a smile. She could not imagine Roy's wrath could be very alarming, especially as Olive owned her father had been very lenient to him, and had promised to give the subject his full consideration. In this case, Olive's interference had really worked good ; but Roy's manhood had taken fire at the notion of being watched and talked over ; his father's mild hints of moral weakness and dilatoriness had affronted him ; and though secretly relieved the difficulty of revelation had been spared him, he had held his head higher, and had crushed his sister by a tirade against feminine impertinence and interference ; and, what hurt her most, had declared his intention of never confiding in such a "meddlesome Matty again."

Mildred was thankful the darkness hid her look of amusement at this portion of Olive's lugubrious story, though the girl herself was too weak and cowed to see the ludicrous side of anything ; and

her voice changed into the old hopeless key as she spoke of Richard's look of withering scorn.

"He was almost too angry to speak to me, Aunt Milly. He said he never would trust me again. I had better not know what he thought of me. I had injured him beyond reparation. I don't know what he meant by that, but Roy told me that he would not have had his father troubled for the world; he could manage his own concerns, spiritual as well as temporal, for himself. And then he sneered; but oh, Aunt Milly, he looked so white and ill. I am sure now that for some reason he did not want papa to know; perhaps things were not so bad as I thought, or he is trying to feel better about it all. Do you think I have done wrong, Aunt Milly?"

And Olive wrung her hands in genuine distress and burst into fresh tears; and sobbed out that she had done for herself now; no one would believe she had said it for the best; even Rex was angry with her—and Cardie, she was sure Cardie would never forgive her.

"Yes, when this has blown over, and he and his father have come to a full understanding. I have better faith in Cardie's good heart than that."

But Mildred felt more uneasy than her cheerful

words implied. She had seen from the first that Richard had persistently misunderstood his sister ; this fresh interference on her part, as he would term it, touching on a very sore place, would gall and irritate him beyond endurance. He had no conception of the amount of unselfish affection that was already lavished upon him ; in fact he thought Olive provokingly cold and undemonstrative, and chafed at her want of finer feelings. It needed some sort of shock or revelation to enable him to read his sister's character in a truer light, and any kind of one-sided reconciliation would be a very warped and patched affair.

Mildred's clear-sightedness was fully alive to these difficulties ; but it was expedient to comfort Olive, who had relapsed into her former state of agitation. There was clearly no wrong in the case ; want of tact and mistaken kindness were the heaviest sins to be laid to poor Olive's charge ; yet Mildred now found her incoherently accusing herself of wholesale want of principle, of duty, and declaring that she was unworthy of any one's affections.

“ I shall call you naughty for the first time, Olive, if I hear any more of this,” interrupted her aunt ; and by infusing a little judicious firmness into her voice, and by dint of management, though not

without difficulty, and representing that she herself was in need of rest, she succeeded in persuading the worn-out girl to seek some repose.

Unwilling to trust her out of her sight, she made her share her own bed ; nor did she relax her vigil until the swollen eyelids had closed in refreshing sleep, and the sobbing breaths were drawn more evenly. Once, at an uneasy movement, she started from the doze into which she had fallen, and put aside the long dark hair with a fondling hand ; the moon was then shining from behind the hill, and the beams shone full through the uncurtained windows ; the girl's hands were crossed upon her breast, folded over the tiny silver cross she always wore, a half-smile playing on her lips—

“ Cardie is always a good boy, mamma,” she muttered, drowsily, at Mildred's disturbing touch. Olive was dreaming of her mother.

END OF VOL. I.





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